



Religious Life in the New World (continued)

1. Mordechai Arbeil, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Women: *Caribbean Islands and the Guianas*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/caribbean-islands-and-guianas>

A special custom prevalent in the Caribbean area was a prenuptial agreement called “Shetar Halizah.” According to Jewish law a husband’s brother has to marry his widowed sister-in-law if she was left childless. This obligation could only be lifted by going through a halizah ceremony in which the widow takes off her brother-in-law’s shoe and denounces him for refusing to marry her. Until this ritual takes place, the widow cannot remarry and she remains an agunah (“anchored” woman).

To prevent this situation, in the Caribbean the groom’s brother gave the bride—at the marriage ceremony—in writing, a letter granting her halizah in case of the death of his brother. The wording, taken from an actual example from Kingston, Jamaica, in 1824, was as follows, “... the woman Esther, wife of my brother Uri, should hold it as proof that I have consented of my own free will ... that if Esther will have need of halizah, I am obligated to free her of a valid halizah” (This halizah letter, in the possession of M. Arbeil, was given in Kingston, Jamaica, by Yitzhak Yehuda son of Eliezer to Esther daughter of Naftali Halevi, and was signed by two leaders of the community.)

2. Rabbi Joseph Caro (16th century Israel), Code of Jewish Law 82:2-3

A kosher bird may be eaten based on a tradition, meaning that it is obvious to people there that this is a kosher bird...

And if it is known not to be *doreis*, there are three signs of a kosher bird: An extra toe, a crop and a gizzard that can be peeled by hand... Even if it has these three signs, one should not eat it, for we are concerned that it might be *doreis* – unless they have a tradition from their ancestors that it is kosher.

Some say that if a bird has a broad beak, and the sole of its foot is broad like that of a goose, then it is known not to be *doreis*, and one may eat it if it has the aforementioned three physical signs.

3. Rabbi Moshe Isserless (16th century Poland), Code of Jewish Law 82:3

And some say one should not rely even on this [comparison to a goose], and one should not eat any bird without a tradition that it is kosher. This is the practice, and one should not deviate from it.

4. Rabbi Ari Zivotofsky, *Is Turkey Kosher?*, J of Halacha and Contemporary Society 35 (Sp. 1998)

- We rule that a tradition is not necessary (*Shoel uMeishiv*)
- We only need a tradition if it may be *doreis* (*Arugat haBosem*)
- The turkey is part of the chicken clan (*Dvar Halachah*)
- Sephardim started it (Rabbi Zivotofsky)

Review Questions

- Which events made Europe an inhospitable and tumultuous place for Jews in the 16th and 17th centuries?
- Why were Jews well-positioned to capitalize on the economic opportunity of exploration?
- What was the attitude of 16th century European rabbis to exploration?
- Did learned rabbis go to the New World?
- Why might the Sephardim have been less observant than the Ashkenazim?
- Were there Jewish community professionals in the colonies?
- Why did Jews accept turkey as kosher?

Surinam

5. A triply misdated Ketubah?

http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1984_36_01_00_cohen.pdf

6. Mordechai Arbel, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Women: Caribbean Islands and the Guianas*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/caribbean-islands-and-guianas>

In 1694 the population of the Jewish Savanna totaled more than 570 Jews employing about nine thousand laborers in forty plantations, and in the mid-eighteenth century, two thousand Jews in 115 plantations with tens of thousands of laborers (Arbel 2002, 92). The Jews on the plantation were the owner, his wife and children, the overseer (not always Jewish) and the accountant. The others were plantation workers, usually salaried Indian workers or African slaves and house slaves. The owner's wife was customarily in charge of the house slaves.

7. Dissertation of Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds, 1450-1800*, pp. 701-702

Richard Menkis wrote that the Bordeaux Jewish "community structure was controlled by a strong lay leadership, overshadowing clerical authority to a degree which probably surpassed even the strong lay influence in the Sephardic community of Amsterdam," Brazil, Curacao or Surinam, London [sic?]. None of the *mahamads* of these communities included a rabbi, who was always an employee of these boards. The Amsterdam Sephardic community was "run by the wealthiest 20 per cent of the community," though it lacked the "tight oligarchic control" of the Bordeaux community.

8. Dissertation of Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds, 1450-1800*, pp. 684-685

Hence the *Historical Essay on Surinam* included in its description of a successful 1743 anti-Maroon expedition of Captain David Cohen Nassy the fact that "the enemies were attacked on the day of *Kippur, or of Atonement of the Jews*, and without any regard for this sacred day, he pursued the enemies, set fire to their cabins, utterly ruined the village, tore out of the ground the roots of their victuals, took fourteen prisoners, and killed a large number" (68).

9. Dissertation of Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds, 1450-1800*, pg. 620

In Curacao, Rabbi Jossai Pardo arrived toward the end of the seventeenth century and established an *eruv* to allow carrying on Shabbat. There, too, according to a witness in 1825, the Sephardic planters followed "a number of religious laws relative to agriculture and cattle-breeding, and so doing... lost a part of the produce" of their plantations... Young planters chasing runaway slaves in the forests took the time to conduct morning and evening prayers even while visiting a Maroon village in 1761... In October 1774, the *Parnassim* at Jodensavanne gathered to deal with the case of Joseph Homem Pinto, who had apparently ordered his slaves and workers to work on the Sabbath.

10. 1684 population registers

- 4200 African slaves
- 163 Jews holding almost 1000 African slaves

11. Dissertation of Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds, 1450-1800*, pg. 685

Yet Jews made good, kind masters and maintained the loyalty of their Blacks, according to the authors of the *Historical Essay on Surinam*. Several pages were devoted to describing the warm reception given to a party of Jews chasing runaways from the La Parra plantation, who visited a village of the Juka Maroon, with whom a peace treaty had just been signed. These runaways from Jewish homes "entertained these Jews in every possible way, and each one hastened to lavish foodstuffs upon them and to offer them, as a mark of unlimited affection, their own wives and daughters."

12. Dissertation of Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds, 1450-1800*, pp. 717-719

The taking on of Judaism by a few Blacks or Jewish affinities among small groups of Blacks or mulattos is often held up as proof of the kindness of Jewish masters. Too little information exists about the handful of Black and mulatto Judaizers in Iberian territories to adequately characterize their reception in what passed for crypto-Jewish communities. They seem to have faced no barriers. In nearly every other significant concentration of Black or mulatto Jews – Amsterdam, Cochin, Surinam – they faced collective discrimination, erasure, with or without *halakhic* worries. At the same time, individual Blacks and mulattos clearly found a reception within various communities...

If Jews are said to be so benign toward their slaves, on what basis? It is doubtful that the few Jewish or crypto-Jewish slave traders functioned any differently than their non-Jewish competitors, for instance.

13. Roles of (some) slaves in Jewish communities in the 17th and 18th century

- Resting from work on the Sabbath (1669)
- Ritual slaughter of fowl, under supervision (1696)
- Ushers to maintain synagogue decorum (1772)
- *Shemirah* vigil over the dead before burial (1774)
- Observed *niddah* practices (date unclear)
- Mezuzah cases on their doors, with varying contents (date unclear)
- Used the term *treef* for their own forbidden foods (date unclear)

14. 1794 letter cited in Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, pg. 159

Several among the Portuguese Jewish Nation, out of private affection begot children with some of their female slaves or mulattos. Out of particular love for the Jewish Religion the boys were properly circumcised and the girls instructed by a teacher, as were their descendants.

15. The "Darchei Yesharim" Centre/Synagogue