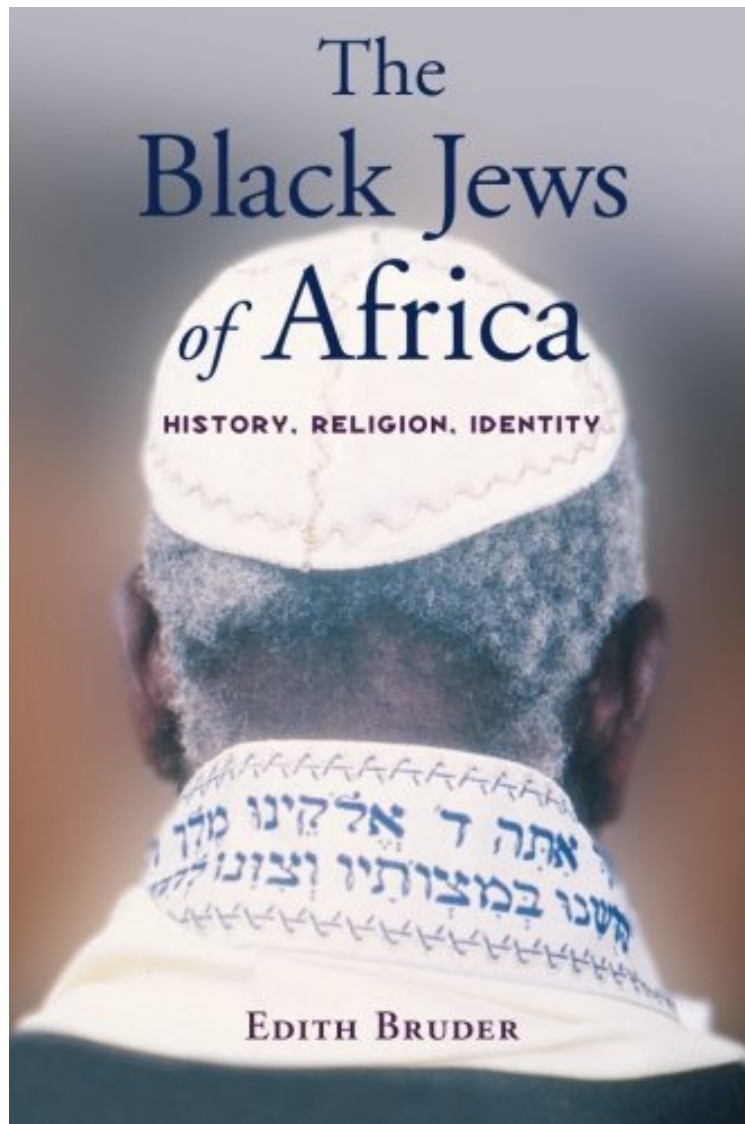


The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity

Edith Bruder

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The last several decades have seen the emergence of a remarkable phenomenon: a Jewish "rebirth" that is occurring throughout Africa. A variety of different ethnic groups proclaim that they are returning to long-forgotten Jewish roots, and African clans trace their lineage to the Lost Tribes of Israel. Africans have encountered Jewish myths and traditions in multiple forms and various ways. The context and circumstances of these encounters have gradually led, within some African societies, to the elaboration of a new Jewish identity connected with that of the Diaspora. This book presents, one by one, the different groups of Black Jews in western, central, eastern, and southern Africa and the ways in which they have used and imagined their oral history and traditional customs to construct a distinct Jewish identity. It explores the ways in which Africans have interacted with the ancient mythological sub-strata of both western and African ideas of Judaism. It particularly seeks to identify and to assess colonial influences and their internalization by African societies in the shaping of new African religious identities. The book also examines how, in the absence of recorded African history, the eminently malleable accounts of Jewish lineage developed by African groups co-exist with the possible historical traces of a Jewish presence in Africa. This elegant and well-researched book goes beyond the well-known case of the Falasha of Ethiopia, examining the trend towards Judaism in Africa at large, and exploring, too, the interdisciplinary concepts of "metaphorical Diaspora," global and transnational identities, and colonization.

"The Black Jews of Africa is an excellent introduction to a complex and controversial subject about African Jews and the Ten Lost Tribes. Dr. Bruder rightly leaves to others the thorny question of Jewish identity. Instead, using a wide range of bibliography that covers the field, she concentrates on describing the beliefs, customs, and history of the various African peoples and communities that claim Jewish identity. I recommend it highly to those interested in understanding modern Jewish history and society worldwide." --Ephraim Isaac, Director of the Institute of Semitic Studies, Princeton

"This ambitious and passionate work explores the fascination that Jewish history and identity have held for the people of Africa. A welcome and challenging addition to the discourse on the lost tribes of Israel, it should be read by anyone interested in Jewish history, African history, and the sociology of religion." --Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Associate Professor, Ca' Foscari University, Italy, and author of *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia*

"Going far beyond the familiar literature on the Falasha, Bruder's book makes a real contribution to understanding the nature of African Judaism and, much more important, how this phenomenon has been regarded in the West. The book presents a major case study in the social construction of religious identities." --Philip Jenkins, author of *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*

"Edith Bruder's study of Black African Jews deserves critical acclaim for focusing on a topic in African history that has been woefully neglected as a primary topic of discourse. Until now, few scholars have delved into the study of Jews within the larger context of Africa's past. ...[T]he book should be recognized in the historiography as the work that permanently widened Africa's historical lens." --African Studies

About the Author: Edith Bruder is a Research Associate in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and in the French National Center for Scientific Research.