



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.

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