THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE
CHAPTER FIVE

NEW CHRISTIANS, JEWS, AND AMSTERDAM AT THE CROSSROADS OF EXPANSION SYSTEMS

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This essay will explore the Iberian or ‘first’ expansion system as it was a shifting to the Northwestern European, or second, expansion system, roughly between 1595 and 1635. Within the context of this system, two New Christian family networks involved in the slave trade, the Dias Henriques and the Gramaxo, will be discussed. These New Christian families and their networks were representative of the way in which the Iberian expansion system worked. This essay argues that for Iberian New Christians involved in the Atlantic trade, in general, and slave trading, in particular, there were two separate routes—the Angola/Brazil route and the Cape Verde-Cartagena route—which were not particularly linked or integrated in the early-to-mid-seventeenth century.

This essay also asserts that, in the Iberian expansion system, family networks, particularly New Christian family networks, were important and useful. Jews, however, were mostly unimportant. This crucial transition period between expansion systems also coincided with a gradual coalescence of religious identities. New Christians like the Gramaxo began to become integrated into the larger Iberian Catholic colonial elite. Meanwhile, some members of the Dias Henriques family later become practicing Jews, while others retained their New Christian identities—a fact that reflects the ambiguities and fluidity of religious identities in the Iberian expansion system, as well as in the Early Modern period as a whole. In neither of the Iberian networks discussed, however, was Amsterdam of any real importance for their slave trading operations. In fact, once members of the Dias Henriques family arrived in Amsterdam, they gave up slave trading altogether. Thus, this essay will, in addition, argue that the Sephardim in the Dutch Republic, at this stage, were only very peripherally and intermittently involved in the slave trade during the crucial period when there was a transition from one expansion system to another. By the time the second expansion