

Communities of port Jews and their contacts in the Dutch Atlantic World

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Abstract. In the late 16th century, Jews and conversos created a trading network that tied together ports in Portugal, Brazil and the Netherlands. This network became the chief Dutch commercial circuit in the first quarter of the 17th century and offered benefits to Jews and conversos that were not solely economic ones. This circuit made it possible for Brazilian New Christians to return to Judaism in Amsterdam and Amsterdam Jews to establish a community in Brazil. In the process, the port Jews of Recife (Brazil) and Amsterdam became closely connected, especially after warfare closed off access to Portuguese ports in the network. Amsterdam Jews arrived in force in Recife during the 1630s, but traveled back to Amsterdam during the years 1645–54, since the Dutch colony in Brazil was shrinking and, eventually, was captured by Portuguese troops. Jews contributed commercially, financially, and militarily to this short-lived colony and were rewarded with privileges, which, for this time, were remarkable.

“Port Jews,” it has been said, “were travelers, strangers, boundary-crossers and cultural brokers...purveyors of products...between far and near.”¹ So true is this statement that ‘port Jews’ must be viewed from a perspective much like that used by practitioners of Atlantic history, who place interconnectedness at center stage. Their studies concentrate on the flow of people, commodities, microbes, and information, and, in the end, they offer a new perspective that goes beyond the traditional one of studying people in their immediate locale and changes the way we understand people, communities, and nations. For it takes into account social, cultural, political, and economic impact over a wide area, in our case in particular, that of the Atlantic world. This perspective is especially useful for studying Jews and crypto-Jews in the 17th century Dutch colonies of Recife in Brazil and Willemstad in Curaçao. These port Jews *par excellence* will now be at the center of this study. The Jews of New Amsterdam, who were not commercially important, and the Jews of Suriname, who settled in the New World expressly in order to engage in plantation agriculture, will not be discussed.²

The port Jews who settled in the Dutch colonies began their journey in Portugal from where they migrated to Brazil and northern Europe in the late 16th century. They did not sever relations with their native soil, but created a commercial network that tied together Portugal, northeastern Brazil, and Amsterdam into a neat triangle. The well-traveled commercial highway between Brazil and the Dutch Republic enabled Brazilian New Christians to return to Judaism in Amsterdam and Amsterdam Jews to establish a community in Brazil. In the process, the port Jews of Recife and Amsterdam became intimately connected. Many poor Jews from Amsterdam settled in Recife and the adjacent town of Mauricia. This temporary relief from caring for the poor came to an end, however, after 1645, when the Portuguese conquest of Brazil forced the Jews – now illegally – living there to return to Amsterdam. Some of the returnees were also well-to-do, and they provided the Amsterdam Jewish community with a significant commercial stimulus.

Yet it would be wrong to view the Sephardim in the Dutch orbit merely as beneficiaries of enlightened policies. Sephardim in Portugal and Brazil helped shape Dutch trans-Atlantic trade, while others contributed significantly to the creation and expansion of Dutch Atlantic ports. Jews also distinguished themselves on the battlefield, which prolonged the life of Dutch Brazil. The privileges these Jews received were a reward for indispensable contributions.

The three stages of Sephardi port Jewry

Many of the Sephardim studied here did not revert to Judaism until after they had migrated from the Iberian peninsula to northern Europe. The same goes for the Sephardim whom David Sorkin has studied. Sorkin argues that “[m]any of the *conversos* and crypto-Jews who left the Iberian peninsula moved to the Mediterranean ports of Venice and Livorno, the Atlantic ports of Bordeaux, London, Amsterdam and Hamburg, and the New World ports of Jamaica, Surinam [sic], Recife and New Amsterdam. Many of those who remained in Spain and Portugal were active in commerce as well. The result was a Sephardi trade network which connected the old Mediterranean routes with the new Atlantic economy.”³

This portrayal may be further articulated. In the Atlantic world, there were three, partly overlapping, stage in the history of Sephardi port Jews: those of Antwerp, the Spanish-Atlantic, and the (European)

North Atlantic. The first began in the mid-16th century, when Portugal's trade with Brazil grew more important. As New Christian merchants came to control commercial ties with Brazil, they also became heavily involved in the African slave trade. In Europe, their presence was particularly important in the Flemish port of Antwerp, which rapidly became one of Europe's main commercial centers, combining the functions of entrepôt and financial center. *Converso* merchants settling in Antwerp enjoyed a special asset, their excellent relations with the Portuguese crown, which practically monopolized the spice trade. Consequently, Jonathan Israel writes, in the last decades of the 16th century, until 1595 "almost the whole distribution of Portuguese East Indian spices and Brazil sugar to northern Europe was handled by the Portuguese New Christians ... residing in Antwerp."⁴

The crown-union between Spain and Portugal in 1580 signaled the start of the second stage, during which *converso* businessmen crossed the Spanish border and infiltrated the Seville-based trade with the Americas. Portuguese merchants, or their agents, settled in Panama, Lima, Buenos Aires, and Cartagena de Indias. The increased complexity of the Sephardi trade networks can be seen in the activities of two *conversos*: García de Yllán Barraza (1591–1655) and Manuel Bautista Pérez (1593–1639). Lisbon-born García de Yllán, a staunch Catholic who worked his way up to become one of the premier Portuguese financiers at the court of Spain's King Philip IV, also conducted trade with his brothers in Cartagena de Indias and Lima, as well as with Jewish or crypto-Jewish business partners in Valencia, Amsterdam, Antwerp, London, and Hamburg.⁵ Manuel Bautista Pérez, a Portuguese merchant who moved from Seville to Lima in Peru around 1620, dealt in slaves, pearls, jewelry, indigo, and textiles from Spain and China. His commercial contacts extended to Seville, Lisbon, Luanda de Angola, Veracruz, Guatemala, Panamá, Cartagena de Indias, Potosí and Santiago de Chile. At the same time, he was the linchpin of a more localized Peruvian network.⁶ By also investing in the Portuguese trade with Asia, men such as Pérez spanned the world. By selling products from the Indian subcontinent at trade fairs in Spanish America and shipping American silver to the Far East, they brought Atlantic and Asian trade into one orbit.⁷

The growing economic power of New Christians may have brought the Spanish Inquisition into play, most famously in Lima, where an alleged conspiracy in 1639 resulted in an auto-da-fé, in which Pérez and ten others died at the stake.⁸ The mid-17th century was a traumatic

period for American *conversos*, many of whom assimilated into Old Christian society, especially in Peru and, later, in New Spain.

The third stage in the history of Sephardi port Jews began at a time roughly contemporaneous to the second, about the end of the 16th century. The Portuguese Inquisition had become more active, and the Dutch ban on trade with the Flemish coast, introduced in 1595, was causing problems for Antwerp's commerce with Portugal. The combined effect was that New Christians left their native soil in large numbers and moved to northern Europe. But their destination was no longer primarily Antwerp, which was losing its significance as an international commercial center. They went, instead, to Amsterdam, Hamburg, Rouen, and a number of other towns that had previously received Portugal's colonial imports from Antwerp.⁹ We may speak of 'port Jews proper' only in this third stage, when Sephardim finally begin to profess Judaism freely, first in northern European ports, and after 1630 in Dutch and English port cities in the New World as well.

Relocating from Brazil to Amsterdam

The three stages thus overlapped, as the protagonists of the first two stages cleared the way for those of the third. The Dutch established colonies in Brazil in 1624–25 and 1630–54 (see Appendix), but prior to these conquests, scores of *conversos* from the New World had begun to trade with Amsterdam and to travel there. Confessions and accusations obtained by the tribunal of the Spanish Inquisition in Cartagena de Indias reveal that Antonio Méndez, who lived as a Jew in Amsterdam in the 1620s, had previously resided in Santa Fe de Bogotá. Antonio Hernández had moved to Amsterdam from a small town in New Granada.¹⁰ The attraction of Amsterdam was even stronger for Portuguese crypto-Jews in Brazil. Diogo Gomes Lobato left Portugal for Brazil in 1599 and transferred from there to Amsterdam, João Castelli moved from Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil to Amsterdam before 1604, and Simão Gomes Dias traveled in 1609 from Pernambuco to Lisbon, fleeing from there to Amsterdam. In Pernambuco, he stayed in the house of Manuel Cardoso Milão, who later moved to London, Amsterdam, and Hamburg.¹¹ The co-owner of a sugar mill in Pernambuco, Portuguese-born João Luis Henriques, moved to Amsterdam with his sons Manuel Sanches and Jerônimo Henriques, who declared themselves Jews in Amsterdam. Other former residents of

Pernambuco who arrived in Amsterdam in the 1610s included Manuel Carvalho, Thomas Fernandes, Joseph Frazão, Gonsalo Nunes, David Ovale, Paulo Pinto, and Diego Nunes Vitória. Finally, Manuel de Campos left Bahia and settled in Amsterdam in 1619.¹²

These men were all merchants, and many of them were involved in exporting Brazilian sugar to Amsterdam. Their commercial ties facilitated a return to Judaism. In the late 16th century, Diogo Dias Querido moved from his native Porto to the Brazilian capital of Bahia, from where he shipped sugar to Portugal, insuring it in Amsterdam. He then relocated to Amsterdam, was formally converted to Judaism, and was one of the founders of the city's first Jewish congregation.¹³

A visitation by the Portuguese Inquisition to Brazil in 1618–19 revealed that the connections between local New Christians and Amsterdam went beyond commerce. The many Brazilian *conversos* discovered judaizing were in touch with openly professing Jews in Amsterdam. Francisco Gomes Pina exemplified the bond between commerce and religion in this city. Pina exported sugar from Pernambuco to Amsterdam, but he was also, *in absentia*, the co-founder of Amsterdam's *Santa Companhia de Dotar Órfãos e Donzelas Pobres* in 1615, an organization which gave dowries to poor and orphaned Sephardi girls in the region stretching from Saint-Jean-de-Luz in France to Danzig, including the Netherlands and Germany. The man who represented him was Paulo de Pina, a fellow founder of the institution. Perhaps the first Pina's relative, Paulo had moved from Lisbon to Pernambuco around 1600, returned to Lisbon nine years later, and arrived finally in Holland, where he shed his Christian guise.¹⁴

The *conversos* who traded and traveled in the Portugal–Brazil–Amsterdam triangle helped create the premier Dutch commercial circuit in the Atlantic world. These merchants included some of the earliest Sephardi settlers of Amsterdam, such as Manoel Rodrigues Vega and Garcia Pimentel, who arrived, respectively, from Antwerp and Venice in the mid-1590s. Their commercial contacts extended to Portugal, Brazil, North Africa, Spain, England, the Atlantic islands, and the Levant. Manuel's brother, Pedro Rodrigues Vega, who moved from Antwerp to Amsterdam in 1599, soon left for Bahia. There he bought a sugar plantation and sent cargoes of sugar and ginger to Manoel in Amsterdam.¹⁵ And in the year 1618 alone, Paulo de Pina imported cargoes, no doubt principally sugar, from Brazil on five different ships, three Dutch and two Portuguese.

In the same year, the Portuguese Inquisition began its offensive against *converso* merchants, especially in Porto, whose records reveal

the variety of commercial connections between that port city and Amsterdam. This offensive cost the *conversos* and their Jewish relatives dearly, whether through arrests or confiscations. By September, the Jews of Amsterdam claimed to have lost more than half a million guilders, “much of which was generated by the Brazil trade.”¹⁶

Portuguese Jews and the Dutch invasion of Brazil

Conversos in Portugal and Jews in Amsterdam also incurred serious losses after the renewal of Dutch–Habsburg hostilities in 1621. As a rule, Dutch ships had previously left shipping between Portugal and Brazil unharmed, but with the establishment of the Dutch West India Company in 1621, there was a change of course. The Company was founded, as one of its directors put it, to “cut off the nerves and veins of the King of Spain’s annual revenues, from which the blood and vivifying spirit spreads through his large body.”¹⁷ Statements like this one paved the way for Dutch privateers to target shipping in the South Atlantic between Portugal and its South American colony. A contemporary Dutch historian asserted that the Portuguese port of Viana alone lost twenty-six of twenty-nine ships active in the Brazil trade in the mid-1620s.¹⁸

Although the Jewish residents of Amsterdam were unintended victims of these maritime attacks, they could not count on compassion from the Dutch authorities. Attempts by Sephardi merchants in Amsterdam who shipped sugar from Brazil to Portugal to secure immunity from confiscation in the war that the West India Company was waging on Iberian shipping were unsuccessful.¹⁹ Nonetheless, better times were ahead for Amsterdam’s Sephardim. Gentile Dutch entrepreneurs began to envisage direct control of all aspects of the sugar business, from cultivation to distribution. Profits would undoubtedly be higher and supplies to Brazil cheaper once customs duties were removed.²⁰ The conquest of Brazil thus became an important item on the agenda at the first board meeting of the West India Company.

The Dutch war of independence was to be extended to the Americas, the source of the silver which financed Habsburg war-making. And Brazil, commercially so attractive, yet formally under Habsburg rule since 1580, was the West India Company’s prime target. The ‘Portuguese nation,’ as Amsterdam’s Jewish community was known, contributed little to the West India Company; its investments amounted to a mere 36,100 guilders, or half a percent of all capital

raised between 1623 and 1626.²¹ Nevertheless, Jewish Portuguese participation grew over time, as suggested by contemporary documents from the Inquisition in Cartagena de Indias (in present day Columbia). Members of that town's '*Cofradía de Holanda*,' a crypto-Jewish organization founded to support the Dutch in their naval warfare with the Spanish, were each required to send three hundred pesos annually to Amsterdam's Portuguese Jews. More than one witness attested that Juan Rodríguez Mesa, a Jew apparently born a New Christian in Portugal, possessed the Libro Grande of Cartagena's *cofradía*, which, lined in colored calico, contained the names of all the group's members.²² Another *converso* member of this group, the Portuguese Duarte López Mesa, told the Inquisitors that he had traveled to Amsterdam, describing how he had attended a meeting of what could only have been the West India Company board, although he did not call the Company by its name.²³

Support for Dutch military actions against Habsburg Spain also came from Portuguese New Christians and Jews in the Netherlands. Many of them had no doubt once lived in Brazil, and soon after the West India Company was founded, their leaders, including one David Senior Coronel, alias Duarte Sarayva, had openly lobbied for a Dutch conquest of Brazil.²⁴ Born in the Iberian peninsula around 1570, Duarte Sarayva escaped to Amsterdam, where he remarried in 1598. He was in Pernambuco in 1612, to which he later returned; in the years following the Dutch invasion of 1630, he acquired five sugar plantations.²⁵ The first Dutch conquest of Brazil had taken place six years earlier. When a fleet sponsored by the Dutch West India Company, carrying 3,300 soldiers, arrived at Brazil's capital of Salvador de Bahia in May 1624, the surprised Portuguese defenders quickly surrendered.²⁶

This action was but an interlude. Within one year, a Habsburg fleet had restored Spanish control of Bahia. Undaunted, the Dutch West India Company dispatched another fleet in December 1629. It was perhaps the largest that had ever crossed the Atlantic. Among the soldiers on board were at least forty Iberian and twenty German Jews. The arrival of fifty-two ships and thirteen sloops in Pernambuco in February of the next year augured a successful conquest. As the Dutch consolidated and then expanded the territory under their control in subsequent years, acquiring a large sugar-producing area, Jews and *conversos* started settling in the port town of Recife and other parts of Pernambuco. In addition, several *conversos* living in Pernambuco reverted to Judaism. Still other New Christians adopted Judaism after coming to Recife from Portuguese Angola, while some Brazilian New

Christians embarked for Amsterdam, also in order to embrace Judaism.²⁷ The Dutch conquest of the town of Paraíba may have convinced Domingos da Costa Brandão and Moisés de Almeida to travel to Amsterdam, where they were circumcised. Moisés' friend Manuel Rodrigues Monsanto did the same, leaving with his family for Amsterdam and returning to Brazil around 1640.²⁸ Not all Brazilian Jews remained faithful to Judaism; starting in the early 1640s, some returned to Catholicism. Still by 1645, there were hundreds of Jews in the region, and, as late as 1649, four years after a movement of return migration to Europe had begun, some 350 Jews remained in Recife.²⁹

Among the Jewish settlers arriving from Amsterdam, there were numerous poor, who planned to settle in as yet uncolonized areas. Their disembarkation in Recife in 1638 caused some consternation. Governor Johan Maurits von Nassau-Siegen and his government believed these poor newcomers would harm Brazil's economy.³⁰ And, in fact, in the following years, their condition did not improve. By 1645, community leader Moses Navarro complained about "the extreme poverty of the Jewish nation." Even respectable persons, he argued, had resigned themselves to live on charity.³¹

Jewish activity and liberties in Dutch Brazil

If Jews had encouraged the West India Company to invade Brazil, Jewish intervention was also instrumental in the extension of the privileges that were granted in the Dutch colonies. Jewish liberties were already prescribed in both the outline for the government of Dutch Bahia in 1624 and the administrative rules issued in 1629 for all Dutch colonies then, or ever to be, possessed by the West India Company. Whether Jews had actively lobbied for these privileges is not clear.³² But the privileges were no simple act of gentile benevolence. The Jews' conspicuous significance in trans-Atlantic commerce earned them the right to retail trade in Brazil, which was not recognized in Amsterdam.³³ What is more, after a Jewish company lost 50 men, in 1645, fighting against the Portuguese enemy, even on the Sabbath, the Dutch Estates General ordered that Jews in Dutch Brazil were to be compensated for damage to person or property.³⁴ Thus, from 1645, Jews were considered full-fledged subjects of the Dutch state, a status the Jews in the United Provinces would not obtain until the 1650s.³⁵

Still, the Jews of Recife had to defend their privileges both before and after 1645. The Dutch Reformed Church in Brazil consistently opposed religious tolerance and on at least two occasions (in 1637 and

1653), private Christian residents tried to have the privilege of retail trade revoked. The Jews of Brazil, they said, should enjoy no wider rights than did those of Amsterdam. Abraham d'Azevedo responded in 1653. In a letter sent to the West India Company,³⁶ D'Azevedo argued that every resident of the colony came from abroad; no one group could claim prior, or superior, rights. In addition, through their service on guard duty and their provisioning of the various territories conquered by the Dutch, Jews had been indispensable to the colony. Third, contrary to other nations, the Jews in Brazil had never wavered in their loyalty; not a single person had defected to the enemy. The Estates General fully agreed with d'Azevedo's claim that the economic and military contributions of the Jews were vital.

Recife's Jews also joined hands with their Christian neighbors, in 1637, and sent a letter to the West India Company requesting a measure of free trade between the United Provinces and Brazil. A year later, the Estates General agreed to the request, stripping the West India Company of its monopolies, except for the slave trade, the import of war ammunition, and the export of Brazilwood.³⁷ The liberalization of trade benefited Jews who were already in Brazil and lured new groups of Jews from across the Atlantic.

Along with other settlers, Jews also helped build the towns where they resided. The twin cities of Dutch Brazil were almost entirely new creations. Recife was originally but a small port and the nearby island of Antônio Vaz was almost uninhabited. Jews contributed to the construction of the town of Mauricia on that island and were involved in the remarkable expansion of Recife. A Jew was also involved in the construction of the long bridge that linked the towns.³⁸

Jewish foundations of Curaçao

The Jewish contribution to Curaçao was even more important. Although blessed with an excellent natural harbor, Curaçao did not have a town when the first Jews arrived in 1651. The coming of the Jews changed the island's character beyond recognition. From a barren place where the European presence was largely confined to a fort with a garrison, Curaçao was transformed into one of the busiest ports of the New World. Significantly, Willemstad, the town that sprang up around the harbor, was first mentioned by name in a letter written by a Jewish settler.³⁹

João de Yllán (1609–1697), a former settler of Dutch Brazil and a cousin of the above-mentioned García de Yllán, was a vital link in

Curaçao's development. After successfully negotiating the establishment of a Jewish colony, despite the negative attitudes toward Jews held by members of the West India Company board,⁴⁰ Yllán risked expulsion by engaging in commerce. His permit of residence allowed him only to cultivate fruits and other produce. The Company directors in Amsterdam worried aloud that "Jan de Yllan accomplishes little there [and] concerns himself little with agriculture."⁴¹

Yllán was a port Jew, even if, in his day, Curaçao lacked all port functions, from ship-owning, ship-building and repair, to stevedoring, finance, or inland transport facilities.⁴² In Europe a decade before, Yllán's commercial contacts had extended to Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and Angola.⁴³ In Curaçao, he started importing horses, and supplying flour and clothing to the West India Company employees.⁴⁴ He was followed by other Jews, such as Jeoshuah and Mordechay Enriquez, described in contemporary documents as peddlers and traders in cattle. Jeoshuah is also said to have encouraged Jews from Amsterdam to move to Curaçao.⁴⁵ In due course, commercial ties were forged with Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and the mainland, but initially Curaçao's Jews had no choice but to sell goods to the West India Company, which distributed these supplies among its garrison. In the 1640s and 1650s, soldiers still made up the bulk of the island's Dutch population.

The port Jews of Willemstad and Recife-Mauricia must be understood in terms of their hinterlands and forelands. The expanding and contracting areas that made up Dutch Brazil formed the hinterland exploited by the Jews of Recife. In the peaceful years until 1645, when the twin cities of Recife and Mauricia grew and the sugar trade boomed, they collected taxes and freighted ships bound for the United Provinces. After successive defeats had reduced the area under Dutch control, blocking Dutch access to Brazilian sugar, the port Jews transformed themselves into army contractors, ironically a line of business in which the court Jews of Europe excelled. Their main customers were the Dutch troops, who were always in need of shirts and shoes. From a commercial perspective, Dutch Brazil's last years thus resembled the early period of Dutch Curaçao.⁴⁶

Shuttling back and forth between Recife and Amsterdam

As settlers in a colonial empire, the port Jewries of Brazil and Curaçao had the same foreland. They shared the same land area "on the seaward side of a port, beyond maritime space, and with which the port [was]

connected by ocean carriers.”⁴⁷ Since trade was only allowed with ports in the colonial metropolis, ships sailed back and forth to Amsterdam. The old triangle Brazil–Portugal–Amsterdam had vanished after the Dutch invasion of Brazil. Amsterdam’s Sephardim tried hard to resuscitate the triangular trade during truce negotiations between Portugal and the United Provinces in 1641, but their efforts were in vain.⁴⁸ With Portugal inaccessible, the only Atlantic passage open to the Jews of Recife and Amsterdam in the mid-17th century was that between these two ports, which also furthered these two communities’ integration. Yet there were limits. Daniel Swetschinski has shown how closely integrated the Amsterdam Sephardi community was with those of Hamburg and later London. The same numbers of Amsterdam brides and grooms married in Hamburg as *vice versa*.⁴⁹ This level of reciprocity did not exist between Recife and Amsterdam.

Nonetheless, the trans-Atlantic route connecting the two ports was well traveled. Ishak Mocata o Velho, for example, probably a native of Brazil, lived in Amsterdam in 1639, 1642, and again in 1644. He returned to Recife in the latter year, but was back in Amsterdam five years later. Francisco de Faria was born in Portuguese Pernambuco, converted to Judaism, went to Amsterdam in 1635 with his wife and two children, appears on communal lists in Recife in 1643, and returned, finally, to Amsterdam by 1652. Aharon Serfaty was not a native of Brazil. A relative of Paulo de Pina, Serfaty was the first Portuguese Jew to be circumcised in Amsterdam in 1597. His name is found in Dutch Brazil in 1637, but a year later, he returned to Amsterdam and became president of the Talmud Torah. However, after 1646, he returned to Brazil, where he was elected president of Recife’s Tsur Israel congregation in 1653. He died in Amsterdam in 1670.⁵⁰

The Jews of Willemstad repeated this pattern of frequent oceanic crossings. Abraham Drago, for instance, himself a former resident of Recife, was among the first Jewish settlers in Curaçao in 1651. He returned to Amsterdam within a few years, but as late as 1680, he brought seven families to Willemstad.⁵¹

Jews began to leave Recife-Mauricia after the start of a rebellion in 1645 that ended in the Portuguese conquest of Dutch Brazil in 1654. Admittedly, the return of two hundred Jewish families to Amsterdam weighed heavily on the local community, but thanks to the resources of some of the more well-to-do, Amsterdam’s Sephardim witnessed a new economic boom.⁵² Moreover, despite Brazil’s disappearance from their horizons, the world beyond the Atlantic kept beckoning. In coming years, Jewish settlements were founded in various locales in the

Caribbean and circum-Caribbean. This settlement was encouraged by a number of crises, especially a demographic one. The arrival in Hamburg and Amsterdam of Jews from Dutch Brazil and crypto-Jews from the Iberian peninsula (following the downfall of Gaspar de Guzmán, the once powerful Count-Duke of Olivares, who had been their protector) led to overcrowding in both cities. The need to create new places where these Jews might live was urgent.⁵³

Communities that came into being after the Brazilian exodus included Barbados, Martinique, and New Amsterdam. Settlements in Guiana were founded through the efforts of former residents of Dutch Brazil who had initially returned to the Netherlands, most notably, David Cohen Nassi, Abraham Cohen, Philipe de Fuentes, and Moses Netto. In 1657 Nassi signed a contract with the Estates of Zeeland, which allowed him and other Brazilian veterans 'of the Hebrew nation' to carve out an agricultural colony in Essequibo in western Guiana. All Jews were granted freedom of religion and conscience, and they were not required to appear in court on the Sabbath or on Jewish holidays.⁵⁴ Jews also settled on the nearby Pomeroon river. However, both colonies were destroyed by English troops in 1666. An equally short life was granted to the Dutch colony of Cayenne, where Nassi had obtained extensive privileges in 1659, but which fell into French hands five years later. Some refugees from these abortive colonies found their way to the English settlement of Suriname, which in turn was seized by a Dutch force in 1667.⁵⁵ In Guiana, therefore, rural Jewish settlements, far from any port, were the legacy of entrepreneurial port Jews like Nassi.

Port Jews thus were sojourners in a dynamic Atlantic world. During the first decades of the 17th century, Portuguese crypto-Jews established connections between Amsterdam and various ports in the Atlantic through migration, travel, and trade. Although Portuguese ports were originally an important link in the Sephardi commercial networks, warfare virtually precluded the continuation of trade with Portugal after 1621. Attempts to revive the old network after Portugal's independence in 1641 failed, as the Dutch authorities vowed to continue the war. Under the circumstances, the link between Amsterdam and Recife assumed great significance for the Portuguese port Jews, who incessantly crossed the ocean with their goods and letters of exchange. But the Atlantic route was not just a trade route. Both before and after 1630, it was a road that enabled a return to ancestral belief and served to unify port Jewries on both sides of the ocean.

Notes

1. Lois C. Dubin, " 'Wings on their feet . . . and wings on their head': Reflections on the study of Port Jews," *Jewish Culture and History* 7 (2004):16–30; also in David Cesarani and Gemma Romain, eds., *Jews and Port Cities, 1590–1990: Commerce, Community and Cosmopolitanism* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 16–30.
2. On Suriname in general, see Cornelis C. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas, 1680–1791* (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1985), 312–374. On Suriname's Jewish settlement, Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991).
3. David Sorkin, "The port Jew: Notes toward a social type," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50:1 (Spring 1999): 86–97, esp. 89.
4. Jonathan I. Israel, "The economic contribution of Dutch Sephardi Jewry to Holland's Golden Age, 1595–1713," in: idem, ed *Empires and Entrepots: The Dutch, the Spanish Monarchy, and the Jews, 1585–1713* (London/Ronchevert, West Virginia: Hambledon, 1990), 417–448, esp. 420. Other import items in which they came to specialize were cotton, ivory, and diamonds. See Jonathan I. Israel, "The Changing Role of the Dutch Sephardim in International Trade, 1595–1715," in Jozeph Michman, ed., *Dutch Jewish History. Proceedings of the Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands, November 28–December 3, 1982, Tel-Aviv – Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Tel-Aviv University/Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Institute for Research on Dutch Jewry, 1984), 31–51, esp. 32–33, 36–37.
5. Maurits A. Ebben, *Zilver, brood en kogels voor de koning. Kredietverlening door Portugese bankiers aan de Spaanse kroon 1621–1665* (Dissertation: PhD Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 1996), 151–152. Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550–1750* (London/Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998), 101–102.
6. Seymour B. Liebman, *New World Jewry, 1493–1825: Requiem for the Forgotten* (New York: Ktav, 1982), 68–69. René Millar Corbacho, "Las confiscaciones de la Inquisición de Lima a los comerciantes de origen judío-portugués de la 'gran complicidad' de 1635," *Revista de Indias* 43 (1983), 27–58, esp. 40–41.
7. James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia under the Habsburgs, 1580–1640* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 36, 142–143, 209.
8. See Boyajian, *Portuguese trade*, 179, for the arrest and trials of New Christians in Goa in the 1630s and 1640s.
9. Israel, "Economic Contribution," 420.
10. Ricardo Escobar, "Los criptojudíos de Cartagena de Indias: Un eslabón en la diáspora conversa (1635–1649)," *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 29 (2002), 52–53. See also David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 604–605.
11. Egon Wolff and Frieda Wolff. *Judaizantes e judeus no Brasil 1500–1808. Dicionário Biográfico*, 3 vols. (Rio de Janeiro: self-published, 1986–1987), 1: 37, 39, 106, 125.
12. Jeronimo Henriques was in Amsterdam as early as December 1609. Wolff, *Judaizantes*, 32, 35, 69, 92, 143, 148, 160, 205.
13. K. Ratelband, ed., *De Westafrikaanse reis van Piet Heyn 1624–1625* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 49. Arnold Wiznitzer, *The Jews of Colonial Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 46–47. Wolff and Wolff, *Dicionário*

- Biográfico*, I: 163. Egon Wolff and Frieda Wolff, *Judeus em Amsterdã. Seu relacionamento com o Brasil, 1600–1620* (Rio de Janeiro: self-published, 1989), 78.
14. Wolff and Wolff, *Dicionário Biográfico*, I: 158–159. Paulo de Pina became one of the community leaders in Amsterdam before moving to Hamburg, where he died; see Marian and Ramón F. Sárraga, “The poet Moses Gideon Abudiente and his family in Amsterdam and Hamburg: Echoes of 1666 Sabbatian polemics in Hamburg epitaphs,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 35:2 (2001): 214–240, esp. 219–220. See for the *Dotar*, Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 47–48, 134–143; Daniel M. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans. The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London/Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000), 178–181.
 15. Christopher Ebert, “Dutch trade with Brazil before the Dutch West India Company, 1587–1621,” in Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven, ed., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Trans-Atlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 49–73, esp. 66; Daniel M. Swetschinski, “Kinship and commerce: The foundations of Portuguese Jewish life in 17th-century Holland,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 15 (1981): 52–74, esp. 63–64.
 16. Ebert, “Dutch Trade with Brazil,” 70–71, 73–74.
 17. Johannes de Laet, *Iaerlyck Verhael van de Verrichtinghen der Gheoctroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie in derthien Boecken*, S.P. L’Honoré Naber, ed., 4 vols. (’s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1931–1937), 1: 5.
 18. C.R. Boxer, *Salvador de Sá and the Struggle for Brazil and Angola, 1602–1686* (London: Athlone, 1952), 65.
 19. Israel, “Economic Contribution,” 430.
 20. John Carter Brown Library (Providence, Rhode Island.), Codex Du-1. Beschrijvinge van de custen van Brasil, en verder zuidelijk tot Rio de la Plata, toestand der fortien, enz. Getrokken uit scheepsjournalen, officiële verklaringen enz. van 1624–1637. Wt het raport van Joannes van Walbeeck,“ fol. 17.
 21. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 109–110. José Antonio Gonsalves de Mello, *Gente de Nação. Cristãos-novos e judeus em Pernambuco 1542–1654* (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco and Editora Massangana, 1989), 207–208.
 22. Anna María Splendiani, *Cincuenta años de Inquisición en el Tribunal de Cartagena de Indias 1610–1660*, 4 vols. (Santafé de Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, Instituto Colombiano de Cultura Hispánica, 1997), 3: 43, 48, 64. Testimony of Blas de Paz Pinto, Francisco de Heredia, and Manuel de Fonseca Enríquez, February 27, 1637, and Manuel de Fonseca Enríquez, September 25, 1636. Seymour B. Liebman, *The Jews in New Spain: Faith, Flame, and the Inquisition* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1970), 220–221.
 23. Splendiani, *Cincuenta años*, 3: 50. Testimony of May 5, 1636. A decade later, the Cofradía raised funds both to support the Dutch war on Spain and to aid Jewish communities in the Holy Land. Liebman, *New World Jewry*, 80.
 24. See for instance, Nationaal Archief (NA), The Hague, Staten-Generaal 5751, Willem Usselincx to the Estates General. The Hague, February 24, 1623.
 25. Egon Wolff and Frieda Wolff, *A Odisséia dos Judeus de Recife* (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Judaicos, 1979), 52–55.
 26. S.P. L’Honoré Naber, ed., *Documenten uit het archief van den Luitenant-Admiraal Piet Heyn* (Utrecht: Kemink and Zoon, 1928), lviii–lxiii.

27. Examples of Pernambuco *conversos* who reverted to Judaism include Joseph Atias, Simão Drago, Vasco Fernandes, Baltazar da Fonseca, Rodrigo Alvares da Fonseca, Miguel Rodrigues Mendes, and Simão do Vale. Wolff and Wolff, *Dicionário Biográfico*, 1: 15, 32, 63, 73–74, 76, 119, 199. Manuel Gomes, a native of Guimarães in Portugal, resided in Angola before moving to Dutch Pernambuco, and Gaspar Lopes lived as a Christian in Angola, but as a Jew in Dutch Brazil. Wolff and Wolff, *Dicionário Biográfico*, 1: 86, 107–108. See for Jews returning to Catholicism in Brazil: Bruno Feitler, *Inquisition Leuven, juifs et nouveaux-chrétiens au Brésil. Le Nordeste XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2003), 180–183.
28. Inquisition testimony of Salvador das Neves, Lisbon, October 23, 1637, in Maximiano Lemos, *Zacuto Lusitano. A sua vida e a sua obra* (Porto: Eduardo Tavares Martins, 1909), 355; José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, “Gente da Nação. Judeus residentes no Brasil holandês, 1630–54,” *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano* 51 (1979), 11–233, esp. 67, 147. Similarly, Portuguese *conversos* in Senegambia routinely traveled to Amsterdam to be circumcised: Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, “Two early 17th-century Sephardic communities on Senegal’s Petite Côte,” *History in Africa* 31 (2004): 231–256, esp. 238–239.
29. See for the debate on the size of the Jewish population of Dutch Brazil, Arnold Wiznitzer, “The number of Jews in Dutch Brazil (1630–1654),” *Jewish Social Studies* 16:2 (April 1954): 107–114; Mello, *Gente de Nação*, 281–282; Egon Wolff and Frieda Wolff, *Quantos judeus estiveram no Brasil holandês e outros ensaios* (Rio de Janeiro, 1991), 92–94.
30. Isaac S. Emmanuel, *Precious Stones of the Jews of Curaçao. Curaçaoan Jewry 1656–1957* (New York: Bloch, 1957), 171.
31. NA, Oude West-Indische Compagnie, 71. Minutes of October 4, 1645.
32. NA, Staten-Generaal 5751. Outline for the government of Bahia and other places to be conquered in Brazil: *Groot Placcaet-Boek* (’s-Gravenhage, 1664), 2: 1235.
33. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 11–13, 19.
34. Wiznitzer, *Jews in Colonial Brazil*, 99–100. B.N. Teensma, “Resentment in Recife. Jews and public opinion in 17th-century Dutch Brazil,” in Jan Lechner, ed., *Essays on Cultural Identity in Colonial Latin America* (Leiden: Vakgroep Talen en Culturen van Latijns-Amerika, 1988), 63–78, esp. 75–76.
35. Peter A.J. van den Berg, “Inboorlingschap en ingezetenschap in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden, 1600–1795,” *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 71 (2003): 125–153, esp. 136. Jonathan I. Israel, “Spain and the Dutch Sephardim, 1609–1660,” in Israel, *Empires and Entrepots*, 355–416, esp. 387.
36. Herbert I. Bloom, *The Economic Activities of the Jews of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Williamsport, Pennsylvania: Bayard, 1937), 136–137. NA Staten-Generaal 5765. Remonstrance of Abraham d’Azevedo, The Hague, September 26, 1653, to the deputies of the West India Company Chambers.
37. This arrangement officially applied to trade with Olinda, the town in Pernambuco that was initially designated as the capital of Dutch Brazil. In practice, however, it must have applied to Recife. *Reglement byde UWest-Indische Compagnie, ter Vergaderinge vande Negentiene, met approbatie vande Ho: Mo: Heeren Staten Generael, over het openstellen vanden handel op Brazil provisioneel ghearresteert* (’s-Gravenhage, 1638). Bloom, *Economic Activities*, 127.

38. Arnold Wiznitzer, *The Records of the Earliest Jewish Community in the New World* (New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1954), 37.
39. Bernard R. Buddingh', *Van Punt en Snoa. Ontstaan en groei van Willemstad, Curaçao vanaf 1634, De Willemstad tussen 1700 en 1732 en de bouwgeschiedenis van de synagoge Mikvé Israël-Emanuel 1730-1732* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Aldus Uitgevers, 1994), 46.
40. Contrast the board's language in a letter of 1652, which characterizes the Jews as follows: "This nation is cunning and generally deceitful; therefore, one should not trust them too much." WIC directors to Petrus Stuyvesant. Amsterdam, April 4, 1652, cited in: Charles T. Gehring, trans. and ed., *Correspondence 1647-1653*. New Netherland Documents Series (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 11:154.
41. WIC directors to Vice-Director Lucas Rodenburgh of Curaçao. Amsterdam, July 7, 1654. In: Gehring, *Correspondence 1647-1653*, 62.
42. Cf. Peter Reeves, Frank Broeze, and Kenneth McPherson, "Studying the Asian port city," in Frank Broeze, ed., *Brides of the Sea. Port Cities of Asia from the 16th-20th Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 29-53, esp. 42. It is not true that the West India Company shifted its activities, and especially the slave trade, to the Caribbean island when Recife was still in Dutch hands. So many historians have perpetuated this myth that it is now, unfortunately, almost universally accepted. See Isaac S. Emmanuel and Suzanne A. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970), 40; Johannes Menne Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27; Hannedea C. van Nederveen Meerkerk, "David Cohen Nassy senior and junior. Hun bijdrage tot de kolonisatie van Suriname," in: *Kruispunt, Literair kwartaalschrift* 36 (1995): 355-385, esp. 379; and Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 116. A more adequate picture of early Dutch Curaçao emerges from Charles T. Gehring and J.A. Schiltkamp, eds., *Curaçao Papers 1640-1665*. New Netherland Documents, Volume 17 (Interlaken: Heart of the Lakes, 1987).
43. Gemeentearchief Amsterdam, Notarieel Archief 1501, Act of July 22, 1641.
44. Vice-Director L. Rodenburgh to the WIC directors. Curaçao, April 2, 1654, in Gehring and Schiltkamp, *Curaçao Papers*, 57-58.
45. Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, 68-71.
46. The suppliers included Abraham Cohen, Isaac Senior Coronel, Pedro de Crasto, Isaac da Fonseca, Abraão Israel, Davi Mendes, Abraham Mocata, and Sara Salon. Wolff and Wolff, *Dicionário Biográfico*, 1: 40, 44, 56, 75, 97, 116, 127, 174.
47. G.G. Weigend, "Some elements in the study of port geography," *Geographical Review* 48 (April 1958): 185-200, esp. 195.
48. Jonathan I. Israel, "Dutch Sephardi Jewry, millenarian politics and the struggle for Brazil, 1640-54," in Israel, *Conflicts of Empires: Spain, the Low Countries and the Struggle for World Supremacy 1585-1713* (London/Rio Grande: The Hambledon, 1997), 150.
49. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 88-89.
50. Wolff and Wolff, *Dicionário Biográfico*, 1: 128, 165, 178.
51. Wolff and Wolff, 62.
52. Israel, "Spain and the Dutch Sephardim," 384-386.
53. Jonathan I. Israel, "Menasseh ben Israel and the Dutch Sephardic colonization movement of the mid-17th century (1645-1657)," in Yosef Kaplan, Henri

- Méchoulan, and Richard Popkin, eds., *Menasseh ben Israel and His World* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 139–163, esp. 146–147.
54. See for Abraham Cohen (“do Brasil”), who never returned to the New World after his departure from Brazil: Gemeentearchief Amsterdam, Notarieel Archief 3098, fol. 131, act of May 5, 1660; Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, 47, n. 64. On Philippe de Fuentes, see Samuel Oppenheim, “An early Jewish colony in Western Guiana 1658–1666 and its relation to the Jews in Surinam, Cayenne and Tobago,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 16 (1907): 130, and on Moses Netto, Samuel Oppenheim, “An early Jewish colony in Western Guiana. Supplemental Data,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 17 (1909): 53–70, esp. 67. Jewish privileges in Essequibo: *ibid.*, 62–63.
55. V.T. Harlow ed., *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana 1623–1667* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1925), 141–142. Israel, “Dutch Sephardic colonization movement,” 148–149. NA Staten-Generaal 12564.42. Privileges granted, September 10, 1659. NA Staten-Generaal 5767. WIC board to the Estates General, January 1664. J. Rijckaert and David van Baerle, Chamber of Amsterdam, to the Estates General. Amsterdam, February 21, 1664.

Appendix

Key Dates and Events

1568	Start of Dutch Revolt against Habsburg Spain
1580	Crown union between Spain and Portugal, extending Habsburg power to Brazil
1609–21	Twelve-year truce between United Provinces and Spain
1621	Foundation of Dutch West India Company
1624–25	Dutch occupation of Bahia, Brazil
1630	Dutch conquest of Recife, Brazil, followed by the capture of several Brazilian captaincies
1634	Dutch conquest of Curaçao
1640	Portugal declares independence from Spain
1645	Start of Portuguese rebellion against Dutch in Brazil
1648	Dutch Republic gains independence
1651	Arrival of first Jews on Curaçao
1654	Portuguese expel Dutch from Recife
