

Sephardic Women Between Dutch Atlantic Worlds, 1654–1680

Erik Odegard¹

Abstract

The fall of the Dutch colony in Brazil in 1654 sparked a period of upheaval and change for the colony's Sephardic Jewish community. Brazil had been a place of unprecedented liberties for the Jewish community there, and over the coming quarter century, the former inhabitants of the colony would search for a "new Brazil" and opportunities to create spaces for organized Jewish life in Atlantic colonies. Brazil had also seen Jewish family migration, and included in the exodus from Brazil and the subsequent resettling were Jewish women. Though their role is difficult to grasp through the colonial records, metropolitan sources allow for a more detailed understanding of the role of Jewish women in the Dutch Republic in pursuit of compensation for possessions and real estate lost in Brazil.

Keywords

Dutch Atlantic, Sephardic Atlantic, Dutch Brazil, Barbados, Interimperial connections

Resumo

A queda da colônia holandesa no Brasil, em 1654, desencadeou um período de agitação e mudança para a comunidade judaica sefardita da colônia. O Brasil tinha sido um lugar de liberdades sem precedentes para a comunidade judaica e, nos próximos 25 anos, os antigos habitantes da colônia procurariam um "novo Brasil" e oportunidades para criar espaços para uma vida judaica organizada nas colônias atlânticas. O Brasil também assistiu à migração de famílias judias e, no êxodo do Brasil e no subsequente reassentamento, estavam incluídas as mulheres judias. Embora o seu papel seja difícil de apreender através dos registos coloniais, as fontes holandesas permitem uma compreensão mais pormenorizada do papel das mulheres judias na República Holandesa em busca da indemnização pelos bens e propriedades perdidos no Brasil.

Palavras-chave

Atlântico holandês, Atlântico sefardita, Brasil holandês, Barbados, ligações inter-imperiais

¹ International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. *E-mail:* erik.odegard@iisg.nl

Introduction

The spring of 1663 was a busy period for the former inhabitants of the Dutch colony in Brazil, which had fallen nearly a decade before in January 1654. The recent peace treaty signed with the Portuguese Crown in The Hague meant that those who had lost possessions or money in the fall of the colony could claim to share in a fund of one million guilders in salt earmarked for their compensation. One of these former inhabitants of Dutch Brazil was Sara Lumbrosa, alias Maria Henriques, the widow of Domingo da Costa Brandão. In April 1663, she submitted her claim to her late husband's lost properties and money lent to Portuguese inhabitants of the colony, a claim which totaled 5,673.65 guilders.¹ She was not the only Jewish woman in a similar situation at the time. Iudica Cardozo, widow of Vasco Fernandes Cardozo, Sara de Tovar (widow of Abraham de Tovar), and the unnamed widow of Miguel Rodrigues Menes would also share in the compensation on the claims of their deceased husbands' estates in Brazil. Jewish women were not unique in this regard. Aeltje Lems (widow of Jan Codde), Lijsbeth Hermans (widow of Dirck Pieters Byl), Maria Mareschal (Josias Mareschal), Catarina Ketwigh (Andries Hein), and Walburgh Herckmans (Pieter Coets) submitted claims as well. Sara had submitted claims worth 9,500 guilders, but the Council of Brabant, responsible for adjudicating the claims, had judged that 5,673.50 guilders was a valid compensatory amount. Sara Lumbrosa's claim is one of the very few claims which explicitly lists enslaved African people amongst the lost properties, listing seven single individuals and two family groups of two and three people, respectively.² What also sets Sara Lumbrosa's claim apart from the that of other women mentioned above, both Jews and Christians, was the way in which she framed the submission of her claims, in which she implored the help of the States-General:

[She] humbly requests that your High Mightinesses might be willing to accept [her claims], the supplicant being a poor widow, rejected by her friends since she, previously being of the Jewish religion, has turned to the true Christian Reformed faith . . .³

¹ National Archives of the Netherlands, The Hague, NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, States-General (SG) inv.nr. 12577.44.

² Brabants Historisch Informatiecentrum, Den Bosch, NL-HtBHIC, 19 Raad van Brabant, 428, scan 233.

³ Ibid. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

While conversion from Judaism to a form of Christianity was not unheard of for this period—we need only to consider the notorious case of Eva Cohen who ran off with one of the Cohen Pallache family’s Christian servants—it was still unusual (Levie Bernfeld 2019: 195–227). But Sara Lumbrosa did not convert for love. Her conversion did offer her another rhetorical tool to beseech the Dutch government to support her. She would in fact reconvert to her old faith four years later, and was then added to a list of people receiving monthly allowances from the Jewish community (Levie Bernfeld 2017: 88). Sara’s story, unique in some ways, also serves to illustrate the common challenges and opportunities that Jewish women faced in the Dutch Atlantic World in the roughly four decades between 1630, when the West India Company (WIC, 1621–1674) initiated its conquest of northeastern Brazil, and the start of the war with France, England, Cologne, and Münster in 1672, often taken as the end of the Dutch Golden Age. During this period, the WIC conquered and then lost a South Atlantic empire which briefly brought Luanda, Recife, Elmina, and São Tomé under Dutch rule. After the loss of Recife, which marked the fall of Brazil in 1654, Dutch colonial ambitions would move to the “Wild Coast” of the Guyanas and the Caribbean. But even this later period saw losses of territory; Cayenne and New Netherland in 1664, and Tobago three times between 1665 and 1677. By the end of the period under study here (roughly the 1670s), the only constant factors in this “second Dutch Atlantic” were the island of Curaçao and the nascent plantation colony of Suriname (Odegard 2019: 88–106). In all the areas mentioned above, Jews would settle, albeit briefly in some cases. The loss of Brazil also sparked a movement of members of the Jewish community to non-Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, including English Barbados and Jamaica.

During this period, Jewish women moving within, and then beyond, the Dutch sphere faced migration, warfare, and the loss of homes, possessions, and often family members. These challenges were to some extent shared by non-Jewish women who had resided in Dutch Brazil. Sara Lumbrosa’s story, which featured migration, warfare, loss, conversion, and reconversion, is one example. But Jewish merchants in Amsterdam, and indeed Brazil, were also able to use their Portuguese background to connect Catholic Portuguese to protestant Dutch. This article presents a general background of the different Jewish communities established in the orbit of Dutch colonization attempts in the Atlantic in the period up to circa 1680, when a new stable situation with important communities in Curaçao and Suriname emerged. I follow Stanley Mirvis’s interpretive choice to focus not just on “the port Jew,” that is, the role of mercantile Jewish communities as middlemen, but also on the “plantation Jew,” the Sephardic planters in slave societies like Brazil, Cayenne,

and Suriname (Mirvis 2019: 565). This earlier period was characterized by group migrations of Jewish settlers, which included women and children, often in contrast to Christian Dutch colonization attempts which were predominantly male affairs. Highlighting the active role of Sephardic women in this story is not always easy to tease out. Women were—nominally at least—confined to the home and the household. The sources available, especially those of a bureaucratic and administrative nature, focus on their fathers, brothers, and husbands. But between the lines we can tease out some stories of Sephardic women in this “first Dutch Atlantic.”⁴ Of necessity, the narrative will focus on the more well-to-do members of the Jewish community, since these are the people who appear most prominently in the sources. Additionally, women in the richer segment of Jewish society were often educated—though there was no official school for girls—to be able to read and write, and since we see them as active economic agents in the notarial archive, their education must have included numeracy and the kinds of calculations required to maintain a bookkeeping.

Placing the Portuguese Nation in the Changing “Dutch Atlantic” in the Seventeenth Century

Aviva Ben-Ur has argued that the frequently used terms “Sephardim” and “Sephardic Jews” are not contemporaneous terms, but came to be used only later to distinguish between Iberian “Sephardic” Jews and more recent arrivals from Germany and further east, styled Ashkenazim (Ben-Ur 2020: 23–27). Certainly, the Dutch sources do not refer to the Sephardim with that term, opting instead for terms like “the Portuguese nation” or simply “Jews.” Yet the term has a long-established scholarly currency, as well as an advantage of familiarity to a modern readership.

The community in Amsterdam quickly became a nexus of Jewish life, and would remain at the heart of Jewish Atlantic networks well into the eighteenth century. Much has been written about the genesis and development of the Amsterdam Sephardic community from the late sixteenth century onwards, and the story does not need to be repeated in full here. For the historian, the centrality of Amsterdam brings the lucky coincidence that the notarial archives of Amsterdam provide a great source to study Sephardic women as they appear in the full range of roles in these sources: as buyers and sellers, as testators, witnesses, petitioners, accusers, and so on. In many cases, the Atlantic links of the people involved

⁴ I follow the rough chronology laid out by Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie (2018) in their division of the two main periods in Dutch Atlantic history around 1680.

become apparent even in notarial acts seemingly on very domestic matters. One example is the testimony of Maria Pereira, who was asked to testify on behalf of her neighbor Manuel de Campos that he was assaulted by a group of black men and women who came to his house on Easter in 1632. The testimony clearly shows that this group must have had some pressing reason to assault the merchant in front of his own home in broad daylight.⁵ Although slavery was prohibited in the Republic, domestic slavery did in fact occur in Sephardic households, though these people were often portrayed as “domestic servants.” As early as 1627, the *Ma’amad* had issued rules discouraging the members of the community from initiating their servants or children with African mothers into Judaism (Ponte 2023).

While unmarried women in the Dutch Republic were not legally considered capable of making their own business decisions, at least in theory, although practice differed, widows could and did run business and were able to make important business decisions (Van der Heijden, Van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Schmidt 2009: 26–52). This was no different in the Jewish context in the Republic. In June 1636, Angela de Fonseca, “remaining widow of Dr. De Montalto” (though not, likely, the more famous Eliahu de Montalto), signed an agreement with Lopo and Miguel de Luna Montalto giving power of attorney to Francisco de Farija to collect outstanding debts in Brazil (Friedenwald 1935: 129–158).⁶

The Jewish community in Amsterdam, established by the last decade of the sixteenth century, immediately played an important role in the growth of Amsterdam’s commercial network through the early seventeenth century. Sephardim in Amsterdam were able to use their connections to family members, New Christians, in Portugal itself and her Atlantic colonies to connect the Portuguese domestic and colonial trades to Amsterdam (Roitman 2009: 117–140).⁷ A later petition, after the West India Company had been created in June 1621, shows how these connections worked in practice. Abraham Nunes Pina and Thomas Nunes Pina petitioned the States-General in May 1622. A Portuguese ship carrying a cargo of Brazilian sugar consigned to them had been taken by a Dutch cruiser and been declared good prize by the Admiralty. They now argued that this flew in the face of repeated decisions in 1577, 1581, 1588, 1592, and 1600 that the trade with Brazil was exempt from restrictions in trade with Portugal and that the Portuguese nation’s trade with Brazil should be seen as a neutral trade. The brothers explained how for years Dutch ships had been able to use their

⁵ Municipal archives of Amsterdam, NL-AsdSAA, 5075, NA, inv.no. 941, scan 474, testimony of Maria Pereira, 13 April 1632.

⁶ NL-AsdSAA, 5075, NA, inv.no. 949A, scan 266-267.

⁷ This argues that in this early system in the Iberian Atlantic, New Christians rather than Jews forged important connections.

contacts with authorities in ports like Viana do Castelo, Porto, and Aveiro to acquire passes enabling them to operate in the Portuguese Atlantic sphere (Odegard 2022: 33–34). Their petition was rejected: the foundation of the WIC, chartered the previous June, had created a new reality in which these kinds of allowances were no longer deemed acceptable. All ships flying Portuguese or Spanish colors would be fair game to the company's cruisers and inhabitants of the Dutch Republic were no longer encouraged to acquire Atlantic commodities by operating inside other empires (Odegard 2022a: 31–44). It is unsurprising that the Sephardic community of the Republic seems to have played no great role in the early history of the WIC, either as investors or as providers of intelligence and experience.⁸ This would change from the second half of the 1630s onwards as the WIC's slow and grueling conquest of northeastern Brazil opened up the prospect of a sugar-producing colony under Dutch sovereignty which would accord more opportunities for Jewish trade, settlement, and investment.

From the beginning of 1637, the situation in Dutch Brazil became stable enough for sugar production to resume on a regular basis. Just in May and June, the Dutch colonial government of Brazil would auction off thirty-seven sugar mills for a total sum of just over 1.5 million guilders.⁹ Some of these mills were bought by Jewish investors who moved into the production of sugar in a big way. The most notable name in these early auctions is Duarte Saraiva, who bought the mills Velho de Biberibe and Bom Jesus on 17 June for f. 10,000 and 60,000, respectively, and the mill Novo for f. 42,000 six days later.¹⁰ Saraiva would not only be the largest Jewish investor in Dutch Brazil, but easily the largest investor overall. When Isaac Senior Coronel submitted the claims on behalf of the estate of Duarte Saraiva, his claim amounted to no less than f. 667,900.¹¹ In all, after the peace with Portugal was ratified, 74 Jewish investors in Brazil deposited their claims, totaling to some four million guilders. Of these, 63 claims were wholly or partially judged justified, amounting to a total sum of f. 2.36 million. The 63 claims and the total sum both amounted to 32 percent of the total number of claimants and the total justified claimed amount (Odegard 2022b: 53–55).

Tax farming was another business activity in which Sephardic investors played an important role, though not as large a role as has been argued. Arnold Wiznitzer, using the twice-translated transcripts of the minutes of the High and Secret Council of Brazil, argued

⁸ Directors and participants in the meetings of the principal shareholders of the company had to be members of the Dutch reformed church.

⁹ NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.01, OWIC, inv. no. 68, scan 508-548.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, scan 529, 530 and 536.

¹¹ NL-HaNA, NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, Staten-Generaal, inv.nr. 12577.43.1

that during the period of 1636–1645, Jewish tax farmers accounted for nearly 63 percent of total tax farm revenues for the WIC (Wiznitzer 1960: 71). But a review of tax-farming revenues for 1639 shows that Wiznitzer used incomplete data for his compilation of tax-farming revenues. Taking into account the smaller tax farms like tolls, rights to the *waag* (weigh-house), and import levies on products like beer, and not just the large posts like the *Dizimos* and *Miunça*, the Jewish stake in the tax farms diminishes rapidly. For example, in the year 1639, Wiznitzer argued that a total of f. 227,100 was sold in tax farms, while the figure should be f. 375,763, or more than 50 percent higher. Of this sum, f. 185,300 was bid by three Jewish tax-farmers, Duarte Saraiva, Moses Navarro, and Benjamin da Pina (who bid on two items—the *Pensão* of Pernambuco and the *Miunça* of Serinhaen), or 49 percent of the total revenue of the tax-farms that year.¹²

The Jewish population of Recife increased to around 1,450 men, women, and children by 1645. By the fall of Brazil in 1654, the population had decreased to around 600 (Wiznitzer 1960: 130). This remaining population then evacuated to the Dutch Republic, although some people ended up in Barbados, the French Caribbean islands, Jamaica, and New Amsterdam.

Sephardic Women and the “Interest of Brazil”

The fall of Brazil in 1654 and the exodus of the protestant and Jewish population of the colony also meant a severe loss of assets for those who had invested in the colony. Real estate, including sugar mills, cane fields (*partidos*), houses and lots in the towns of the colony, as well as money lent to Portuguese inhabitants, was lost. The former inhabitants of Dutch Brazil would in the following years continue to press for the reconquest of the colony and recompense of their losses. In May 1655, former inhabitants of and traders in Brazil presented a petition to the States-General urging reconquest of the colony, arguing that the honor and reputation of the state required this. Included amongst the petitioners were at least ten Jews, including David Cohen.¹³ In 1667, a number of “merchants by sea and ship owners of these lands” who had been engaged in the trade with the North American colony of New Netherland petitioned the States-General not to give up the claims to the colony in the treaty then being negotiated with England. Among these were the Sephardic merchants Jacob Abendana, Joao de la Faya, David Nunes Mendes, Aron Moreno Bencquer, Simao do

¹² The tax-farming revenues have been taken from: NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.01, OWIC, inv.no. 54, scans 589-632.

¹³ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, SG, inv.no. 12557.32.

Vale de Fonseca, and Abrao David.¹⁴ While the earlier petition on Brazil also sported the signatures of a number of Christian women, presenting themselves as the widows of former investors in the colony, no Jewish women signed the petition. This does not mean that Jewish women could not present their interests to the States General.

The peace treaty concluded with Portugal at The Hague in 1662, which went into effect the following year, did address the concerns of the “Brazilian interest” for their lost assets. The Portuguese Crown would make available one million guilders in salt from Aveiro and Setúbal with which to compensate the former inhabitants of the colony (Antunes 2008: 171).¹⁵ Inhabitants would need to deposit their claims with the States-General, which would forward them to the Portuguese ambassador. From 1663 onwards, the claims started to come in, first in a small trickle and later in a veritable flood of claims and deposited evidence, which included (copies of) debt books, notarial deeds, inventories of houses and sugar mills, and the resolutions of the council in Recife.¹⁶ It quickly became apparent that the volume of claims meant that all claimants would only receive a small portion of their claim in compensation. While the Portuguese Crown made one million guilders in salt available, the total size of claims would amount to more than sixteen million guilders (Odegard 2022b: 45–67). The directors of the WIC balked at this prospect; the company itself had put down a claim of over five million guilders, of which it would only receive a fraction. But if more claims by private individuals could be thrown out as improper, more money would remain for the company. The WIC argued to the States-General that an independent court needed to examine the claims and throw out all those which were not deemed fit to share in the compensation. Examples of improper claims included debts of subjects of the States-General, mortgaged sugar mills (since these also appeared in the WIC’s claims), claims without evidence or claims by those who had been deemed responsible for the loss of the colony, a category which included Sigismund von Schoppe, the former military commander of WIC forces in the colony.

The States-General delegated the task of examining the claims to the Council of Brabant, the court of appeals and court in first instance in cases pertaining to land rights for

¹⁴ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, SG, inv.nr. 5768, scan 1-5.

¹⁵ Antunes argues that the compensation consisted of the taxes raised on the export of salt. But lists of salt-loading ships in the Portuguese ports in the archives of the West India Company and the archives of the States-General, as well as complaints by private claimants that the WIC was hoarding the salt, make clear that the compensation was actually paid in salt itself.

¹⁶ The process by which and order in which the claims were submitted can be traced in the extract-resolutions on West-Indian affairs in the archive of the States-General, see for example the resolution of 14 January 1664: NL-HaNA, 1.01.02 SG, inv.no. 4847, scan 5, *Namen ende woonplaatsen van de personen welckers pretensien op den Inventaris vande Brazijlsche schulden zijn gestelt*.

Staats-Brabant, the areas of the former Duchy of Brabant, which had been taken by the Dutch Republic. This process explains why the best information on private investment in Dutch Brazil—including by Sephardim—is found in the archives of the Council of Brabant in Den Bosch, where there are some 1,000 pages of financial information, including copies of notarial acts, private ledgers, inventories of sugar mills, descriptions of real estate, and much more.¹⁷ It is this data which allows for a more elaborate reconstruction of the importance of Sephardic investment in the colony than has been possible so far. The process of adjudicating claims also sheds light on the role and agency of Sephardic women in the process, since we often see them acting as claimants on behalf of their since-deceased husbands. One such example was the widow of Miguel Rodrigues Mendes—she tellingly did not use her own name on the claim—who deposited a claim for 116,493.40 guilders for money owed by the Portuguese in Brazil, as well as a lost house in Recife.¹⁸ Abraham Cohen, the father of Eva Cohen, who ran away with Michiel Verboon to London and was baptized there in October 1680, was another member of the “Brazilian interest” in the Dutch Republic.¹⁹ He had submitted claims to a total of 145,592 guilders and three stivers for four houses in Recife, a mortgage on a cane field and nearly 120,000 guilders worth of loans to private individuals. Abraham Cohen would go on to become something of a fixer for former inhabitants of the colony. He would settle the ongoing dispute between Johan Maurits and the directors of the WIC in the former's favor and be rewarded with a percentage of the former governor's claims to back wages and expenses (Odegard 2022: 174–175). Nor did Abraham Cohen's Atlantic interests end there, as we encounter Cohen as one of the providers of bottomry loans to merchantmen and slavers going to the Guinea Coast in the 1660s.

The twenty-fifth article of the treaty of The Hague was important to the former inhabitants of Dutch Brazil. A first iteration of the treaty had envisioned the return of the colonists, but this was not part of the final treaty. Regardless, return would have been impossible for those Sephardim who had openly taken up Judaism again as the inquisition would surely round them up. Indeed, some claimants added provisions that they were owed more than they had indicated in their claims, but that they were unwilling to disclose the

¹⁷ This material has been kindly scanned and made publicly available by the Brabants Historisch Informatie centrum in Den Bosch: NL-HtBHIC, 19, Raad van Brabant, inv. nos. 428 and 429: https://bhic.nl/integrated?mivast=235&mizig=210&miadt=235&micode=19&milang=nl&mizk_alle=Portugal&miview=inv2

¹⁸ NL-HtBHIC, 19, Raad van Brabant, inv.nr. 428, scans 176-178.

¹⁹ A rough translation of the Dutch “Geinteresseerden van Brasil” which appears in several petitions of the 1650s and 1660s.

evidence.²⁰ Since all claims were made available to the Portuguese ambassador, this might indicate that they were unwilling to disclose the full extent of their financial dealings with family members of “New Christians” for fear of marking them out for investigation by the inquisition. The treaty held out the option that at least some of the losses would be compensated. But though the treaty went into effect in 1663, it was not until 1672 that the Raad van Brabant reached its verdict. In the meantime, all the claims had to be inventoried, potential claimants had to be made aware of the treaty provision, and claims ultimately had to be verified. Abraham d’Azevedo had offered his services to the States-General in facilitating this process. In return, he was promised a “certain sum” for his troubles, on the condition that the Portuguese actually paid. Abraham d’Azevedo had previously served as one of the delegates of the colony sent to The Hague to argue for its continued support by the Dutch state in 1652 (Perlman 2022: 132). In March 1672, just after the Raad van Brabant had reached its verdict, the widow and children of d’Azevedo, unnamed in the source, petitioned the States-General for the promised remuneration.²¹ That April, a sum of 180 guilders was approved for d’Azevedo’s efforts.²² In these cases, we see Sephardic women not only administering families’ estates and keeping track of payments due, but also confidently petitioning the Dutch government for outstanding payments.

The Sephardic Atlantic Beyond Brazil

The fall of Recife in January 1654 sparked an exodus of its inhabitants. Both Protestants and Jews would not be suffered to remain in Brazil, but the threat to the Jewish inhabitants of persecution by the inquisition was much more severe (Bodian 2018: 123–144). From 1654 onwards, we find mentions of Jewish communities throughout the Atlantic world, straddling political boundaries. While Amsterdam would remain a key node for the Sephardim as a religious center and a commercial and educational hub, this period also witnessed the reestablishment of Jewish communities in England and its overseas possessions. There had been incidental connections with Barbados by Sephardic merchants predominantly operating out of Hamburg, but after 1654, there is a larger influx of Jewish refugees from Brazil. In 1657, the ship *Pearl*, outbound to Barbados, was taken by an Irish

²⁰ For example, Manuel de Fonseca Gomes, alias Joseph Velios, submitted a claim of f. 7,500 but sustained that he had another f. 15,000 outstanding in personal loans but for which he provided no names of debtors. Similarly, Simon do Vale sustained he had a further f. 60,000 in loans besides the f. 28,000 in claims for which he did provide evidence.

²¹ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, SG, inv.nr. 4848, scan 41, resolution 9 March 1672.

²² Ibid., scan 45, 22 April 1672.

privateer in Spanish service. On board were 27 Jewish merchants bound for the island (Schreuder 2018: 186). It is important to note that not only the former Jewish inhabitants of Brazil were mobile in this period. We encounter inhabitants of Dutch Brazil in virtually all Dutch, English, and French colonies in the Atlantic.

Jewish settlement on the island colony of Curaçao predated even the fall of Brazil. Back in 1651, Joao de Yllan had received a patroonship to settle a colony on the island, committing himself to settle at least fifty Jewish colonists. But three years later, it was reported that only some twelve colonists had settled the island and that they were more interested in trade than in agriculture, as the patroonship grant had specified (Rupert 2012: 53–55). A similar fate befell the patroonship granted in February 1652 to Joseph Nunes de Fonseca, alias David Nassy. The grant specified that the prospective Jewish colonists should maintain themselves with farming and raising cattle, and were granted the right to go privateering for Portuguese ships. Again, the colony did not take off. Curaçao did not provide a suitable location for agriculture-based proprietary colonies, but the attempts to create Jewish patroonships on Curaçao did establish a pattern that would be taken up again on the so-called “Wild Coast” later in the decade and the next. David Nassy would try his hand again at Cayenne a few years later, for the Wild Coast of the Guyanas was a logical location to look for a new Brazil. The coastal area between the mouths of the Amazon and the Orinoco was a north-south contact zone between the chain of the lesser Antilles, ending at Trinidad, and the mainland Amerindian cultures (Boomert 2016: 71–77, 115–130). It was also an area of dispute between Spain and Portugal and northern European newcomers from the Netherlands, England, and France. There had been Dutch trading posts in this area going back to the early seventeenth century, but their fortunes had waned by the middle of the century. The Spanish and Portuguese attack wiped out some posts, while other were disbanded for lack of regular supplies or after the WIC took over.

It is likely that in the division of areas of interests between the chambers of the WIC somewhere in the late 1620s, the chamber of Zeeland acquired the right to plant colonies or support the planting of colonies on behalf of the WIC. There had been some attempts to found colonies centered on the production of tobacco and trade with the local population by the chamber of Zeeland, but Zeelandic interests were placed on a new footing in the middle of the 1650s when the cities and later the States of Zeeland acquired these rights from the WIC-chamber in the province. This was not a unique event; at the same time, the city of Amsterdam would acquire the rights first for the colony of Nieuwer Amstel on the Delaware, and later for the whole “South river” settlement in New Netherland (Van Grol 1980: 71–

90). The patroonships were crucial to the Jewish settlement in Dutch colonies after the fall of Brazil. When twenty-three Jewish men, women, and children from Brazil arrived in the North American colony of New Netherland in 1655, the local director and council tried to refuse them permission to remain. Calvinist minister Megapolensis also agitated against letting the Jews remain. In the end, intercession by WIC-authorities in the Republic was required to allow the Jews to stay (Jacobs 2009: 200–202). But Jewish settlement was not just tolerated, but actively courted in the case of the mainland South American colonies set up in the same period.

The States of Zeeland had acquired the rights from the WIC to plant a colony on the Essequibo River. This colony, “Nova Zeelandia,” was from the outset intended to be a plantation colony focused on the cultivation of sugar cane, rather than a trading post for trade with the Amerindians or a white settlement colony. In order to entice prospective planters, the States of Zeeland published a set of wide-ranging “liberties” for Jewish planters, which included freedom of worship and representation on the council of the colony (Klooster 2010–2011: 77–82). Essequibo was intended to be a slave society, like Brazil had been. In November 1657, a number of “delegates of the Jewish Nation” proposed a number of changes to the bill of freedoms and exemptions proposed by the States of Zeeland to further Jewish colonization in Essequibo.²³ The first of the proposed changes entailed that instead of four years to pay for delivered enslaved Africans, the planters be granted a term of six years, a request which was denied. This request, along with the other proposed changes, which entailed things like a larger garrison, a longer period of free food deliveries to colonists, and changes to land titles and taxation, shows that the prospective settlers were well aware of their importance to the colonial venture proposed by the States of Zeeland. If circumstances and conditions were unsatisfactory in the Zeelandic colony, the colonists could always try and join their coreligionists in Barbados, Jamaica, or the nascent colony of Willoughbyland on the Suriname river, just east of the Zeelandic venture.

Another such option beckoned further west, on the island of Cayenne. A French colony here had been abandoned by the 1650s, and in 1655, the Gentlemen XIX of the WIC granted a set of freedoms and exemptions to Jan Claessen Langendijck to found a colony at Cayenne. Unlike Essequibo, this was a colony founded under the auspices of the chamber of Amsterdam and after a brief period as a patroonship, the colony was transferred to that chamber in 1659 (Van Grol 1980: 91). That same year, David Nassy was granted a set of freedoms and exemptions to found a colony “on the island of Cajana or other places on the

²³ NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.01, OWIC, inv.nr. 33, scan 2-8.

Wild Coast.” Nassy and his backers were granted the right to settle and cultivate as much land as they could on a frontage of four or five miles on the island or a river near Cayenne. Care would need to be taken that the Jewish settlement was removed from the Langendijk colony on the island itself. All the land under cultivation four years after 1 September 1660 was to be transferred to the colonists as “free allodial ownership,” with the colony having low, middle, and high jurisdictions, with the provision that the *schout* (sheriff) was to be appointed by the WIC, and that either he or the Commander at Cayenne would appoint the aldermen. These men had to be of the Dutch Reformed (Christian) faith to be admissible, so this was not entirely an exclusively Jewish settlement, although Nassy would try and entice Jewish settlers, being granted “such freedoms of conscience with public exercise, Synagoge and School, such they are accustomed to in the city of Amsterdam . . . in the District of our colony as well as all our domains.”²⁴ When the French took over the colony in 1664, arguing that the previous French colony had established a prior French claim, the Dutch inhabitants of Cayenne proper were deported to Europe, set ashore at La Rochelle, and released, but the Jewish settlers at Armire were allowed to remain, with the French guaranteeing their liberties. But in 1667, the English attacked and took all tools, enslaved Africans, and Jewish planters to neighboring Suriname, which was subsequently captured by the Zeelanders (Van den Bel 2021: 86).

In the same year that Nassy acquired the rights for his Cayenne settlement, a group of Jews from Livorno was brought to the island of Tobago, where the Lampsins brothers of Vlissingen had acquired rights for a patroonship and whose settlement was nearly half a decade old at that point. Two of the Jewish settlers were Daniel Levi de Barrios and his wife, Debora, who died on the island (Arbell 2009: 63–64; Roitman 2015: 42). The ultimate loss of the Lampsins colony in the second Anglo-Dutch War precluded a permanent community on the island. English Suriname had been a focus of a Jewish settlement whose members had been actively courted to come and settle in the colony, which was envisioned at first as a dependency of Barbados. When the Zeelanders captured the colony, they already had experience in enticing Jewish colonists to settle in their Wild Coast colonies, and policies promulgated earlier at Essequibo were also applied in Suriname (Klooster and Oostindie 2018: 159–160). In this context in the early history of the colony, Jewish settlers were unproblematic allies seen as part of the white European population, as illustrated by a petition

²⁴ The “Freedoms and Exemptions” for Nassy’s colony are found in: NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, SG, inv.no. 12564-42, minutes of the meeting of the XIX, 12 September 1659. The appointment of Reformed aldermen would seem to refute, at least from the point of view of the WIC, that this was intended as a purely Jewish settlement. See <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/cayenne>.

signed by 48 settlers in Suriname, including at least sixteen Jews, in which they petitioned the States of Zeeland for implementation of earlier proposed measures to stimulate the colony.²⁵ The petitioners mention the population of the colony, noting “[t]hat the number of whites, Christians and those of the Jewish nation, currently here in the land is no more than 800, including women and children.”²⁶ The Jewish settlement in Suriname, later concentrated on the village of Jodensavanne, was envisioned, like its predecessors in Essequibo and Cayenne, as a plantation but also a settlement colony, which meant that not merely men, as owners or overseers of mills, migrated there, but women and children as well.²⁷

In the treaty with England, it had been agreed that English planters would be allowed to leave with their property if they so wished. In a rather surprising turn of events, the English king now maintained that the Jewish planters in Suriname were still his subjects and thus should be accorded the same rights as the other English planters in the colony. One of the key points agreed upon in the capitulation of Suriname to the Dutch was that planters would be allowed to leave the colony with their possessions (including enslaved Africans). The English argued that the Jewish planters were included in this agreement, referring to them as “sujets de sa Maj[es]té de la Nation Hébraïque.”²⁸ The same letter listed ten Jewish planters with a total of 332 enslaved Africans who were claimed as English subjects.²⁹ But despite this claim to subjecthood of the Jewish population in Suriname, and despite the troubled early history of Suriname as a “Dutch” colony, the Jewish population would not move out, and Suriname was to become one of the main centers of Jewish life in the wider Caribbean, with the self-governing Jewish village of Jodensavanne at its heart. The process which had started in Brazil with the limited self-governance of the Jewish community had come to its logical conclusion in Suriname nearly half a century later.

²⁵ Zeeland provincial archives, Middelburg, NL-MdbZA, GIDS102, Staten van Zeeland en Suriname, 1667-1684, piece 225 Petition of the inhabitants of Suriname, 1671 March 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, scan 2.

²⁷ The Jewish population of Suriname at the time of the first census in 1684 was 232, 35 percent of the total white population of 652. This would increase to 1,330 in 1791. See Klooster and Oostindie 2018: 133. The figures have been taken from page 133, which provides the percentage, rather than 132, which provides a different Jewish population at the time of the 1684 census.

²⁸ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, States-General, inv. no. 4848A, scan 184.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, the names are: Isaac Perera [sic] (40 enslaved Africans), Jacob Perera (40), David Perera (12), Benjamin Perera (2), Isaac de Pradoa [sic] (40), Isaac de la Paxa (70), Isaac Govia (25), Aros de Silva (74), Gabriel Antonijs (25), and Moses Baruch (6).

Across Imperial Borders

The above section on Suriname hints at the movement of Sephardim into the English Atlantic sphere during the 1650s. When Brazil fell in 1654, the Dutch and Jewish inhabitants were given a brief period of grace before being ordered to remove themselves from the colony. Matthias Beck, later vice-director of Curaçao, reported that he and his men as well as the Dutch colonists had been ordered to leave Siara in June 1654.³⁰ They had stopped on Tobago on the way and then made their way to Barbados, which was fast becoming a prime producer of sugar, now that Brazilian production had suffered from the conflict over the past decade (Cabral de Mello 1975). Over the course of 1654, Barbados as well as the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique received large numbers of former inhabitants of Dutch Brazil. On Guadeloupe alone, some 1,500 colonists from Brazil were received and settled (Van den Bel 2022: 145). Their number included the likes of former sugar-mill owners like the Van Ool brothers, Van Munninckhoven, and the Sweerts and Listrij families. For the Jewish refugees, settlement on Martinique proved fraught, as governor Du Parquet initially refused rights to settle, spurred on by the Jesuits. Yet when the potential value of the new colonists became apparent, 300 people were settled east of Fort Royal, including some Jews (Van den Bel 2022: 145).

The English islands of Barbados and Jamaica, conquered during this period, also provided opportunities for settlement and the continuation of business activities centered on sugar cultivation and the commercial opportunities it engendered. While earlier scholarship stressed the link between Brazil and Barbados, the idea being that Dutch influence was crucial for the shift to sugar cultivation on the island, Russell Menard argued in 2006 that this link was overstated and that the Barbadian notarial records did not back up an argument for the importance of the Dutch (Menard 2006; McCusker and Menard 2004: 289–330). Yet Menard's study, like so much of the Anglophone scholarship, simply did not consider any non-English sources and referred only to a single article by a Dutch historian. Joris van den Tol is currently conducting research on the Dutch links to Barbados in the Dutch archives and has already found both more transshipments of enslaved Africans and of sugar mill necessities, like kettles, than Menard allowed for (Van den Tol 2023). There are other important caveats concerning Menard's thesis. In the first place, not all transactions were recorded by notaries. The Brazilian claimants, when required to present evidence of their transactions, did not in most cases provide copies of notarial deeds. Rather, private

³⁰ NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.01, OWIC, inv. no. 67, scan 477-484.

administration was submitted, suggesting that even in Brazil not all transactions were notarized. Additionally, the methodology used by Menard in identifying “Dutch” merchants relied simply on whether a name seemed “Dutch” to him. This means that the use of aliases or English middlemen to hide transactions beginning in the Dutch Republic is not taken into account. Jewish merchants, too, fall outside of the scope of Menard’s research, since a number of Jewish merchants had received denization rights and so were counted as English subjects, even though they were still linked in to commercial networks emanating from Amsterdam.

An illustration of the continued connections between Barbados and the Dutch Republic by Sephardic merchants comes as late as the start of the war with France and England in April 1672. On 6 April of that year, the English declaration of war was presented in the meeting of the States-General. Three days later the first of a series of requests was presented to the States-General. Over the coming month and a half, numerous merchants requested that the goods they were still expecting to be delivered to them from Barbados and Jamaica would be allowed to be delivered to them, despite coming from enemy territory and, if ships were taken, that their goods would not be declared good prize by the Admiralty. The Jewish merchants Jacob Perera and Franciscus van Pidro argued that they were expecting goods sent to them from Jamaica by Abram Perera, Salomon Gabaij, and David Gomes. Moijses Pereira and his brothers Aron and Jacob had sent goods worth 41,341 guilders to Barbados and were expecting goods in return, addressed either to them in Amsterdam, or their interlocutors Antonio Gomes Serra and George Willoughby in London.³¹ Goods and money destined for the English Caribbean from Jewish investors in Amsterdam moved through London, sometimes under an English correspondent’s name, and so evaded English mercantile laws. Jacob Pereira on that same 22 April 1672, requested that the products he was still expecting from Jamaica, forwarded to him by Moses and Abram Pereira, would not be considered good prize if taken by a Dutch warship or privateering. At the same time, he requested permission to import 150 barrels of tobacco, 70 pipes of sugar, and 30,000 pounds of ginger, which had arrived in London from his contacts on Barbados and Virginia into the Dutch Republic through neutral ports in the Southern Netherlands or Hamburg.³²

³¹ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, SG, inv. no. scan 45. George Willoughby likely refers to George, 7th Baron Willoughby of Parham.

³² *Ibid*, scan 45-46.

The link with the French-controlled islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique is less well explored, but might be of more importance to the non-Jewish refugees of Dutch Brazil than to the Sephardim. On the French islands, we encounter planters like Paulus de Sweers, the Van Ool brothers, and Munninckhoven, who had previously run mills in Paraiba.³³ Here, too, we find evidence of women pursuing the business interests of the family. For example, in July 1678, Elisabeth de Coning petitioned the States-General to further the restitution of the estates of her deceased husband Paulus de Sweerts on Guadeloupe.³⁴ In all, the Sephardic community proved adept at adjusting to large geopolitical shifts in the Atlantic world in the 1650s–1680s. By acquiring denization rights for some members of extended families in places like Barbados and Jamaica, and by routing ships and credit from Amsterdam via London to the Caribbean, the Sephardic community was capable of linking the financial and industrial center of the Dutch Republic with the new English plantation colonies in the Caribbean and nascent Dutch colonies like Curaçao and Suriname.

A New Dutch Atlantic and the Sephardic Community

The fall of Brazil in 1654 heralded the collapse of the WIC's vision to create a South Atlantic empire. Indeed, the loss of its principal colony would mean the end of the company as an effective organization. The loss of Brazil was presaged by the loss of Angola and followed by the loss of New Netherland and Cayenne (1664) and Tobago (1665, 1672, and finally in 1677). By the early 1680s, a new Dutch Atlantic was centered on the plantation economy of Suriname and the entrepot role of Curaçao. In both these colonies, Sephardic Jews played important—though different—roles in colonial societies and economies. In the intervening quarter-century, the main thrust of colonization attempts in the Dutch Atlantic sphere had been patroonship colonies of one sort or another, including the abortive Jewish patroonship on Tobago, Yllan's attempt in Curaçao, and the Jewish patroonships or villages in Essequibo and Cayenne. These attempts naturally culminated in Suriname during the end of the period under review here. The permanent settlement of Jewish communities in Curaçao and Suriname would also change the structure and composition of the communities there. Until roughly the 1680s, Jewish settlement in the wider Atlantic world had consisted either of single men—sent to foreign ports as factors of Amsterdam-based traders and so

³³ M.M van den Bel, "French Governors and Dutch Merchants: Comparing the First Sugar Plantations in the French West Indies and Barbados, 1638-1664," *Journal of Early American History* 12:2-3 (2022), 121-168.

³⁴ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, States-General, inv.no. 4848, scan 228.

connecting the wider commercial world of Sephardic Amsterdam with places like Barbados and Jamaica—or of family-groups, intended to settle the land and create viable permanent Jewish communities overseas. This was the model adopted—or at least attempted—in a range of patroonships from the abortive colony on Tobago, to Yllan’s Curaçao attempt, to Essequibo under the States of Zeeland, the Amsterdam colony of Cayenne, and finally the Jewish village in Suriname. In these cases, movement of women was crucial as only the presence of Jewish women would enable a self-reproducing community to take root. But once a viable Jewish plantation society had emerged in Suriname, this would begin to change, as slavery challenged ideas of community and identity. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the Jewish community in Suriname gradually moved to accepting the conversion of mixed-race children of Jewish men and enslaved African mothers, though this often meant the loss of the *jehidim* status of the man involved (Ben-Ur 2009: 152–169). These changes in the composition of the community and the ways in which it defined who was, and who was not, a Jew marks a different period in the history of the Sephardic community in the Dutch—and wider—Atlantic world.

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Bionote/Nota Biográfica

ERIK ODEGARD studied history at Leiden University, defending his PhD dissertation there in 2018. Erik is currently employed at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, working on an NWO-funded postdoctoral research project on private investment in the Dutch colony in Brazil in 1630–1654, having previously taught history at the universities of Leiden and Rotterdam and the Mauritshuis museum.

ERIK ODEGARD estudou História na Universidade de Leiden, onde defendeu a sua tese de doutoramento em 2018. Erik trabalha atualmente no International Institute for Social History em Amesterdão, num projeto de investigação de pós-doutoramento financiado pela NWO sobre o investimento privado na colónia holandesa no Brasil em 1630–1654, tendo anteriormente ensinado história nas universidades de Leiden e Roterdão e no museu Mauritshuis.