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Inter-cultural networks as lobbying groups: a case study of the sugar confiscation of 1602

Jessica Vance Roitman

According to the dictionary, to survive, means, quite literally, to remain alive or to live on. In the case of Jews, whether openly practicing their faith or those who were merely of Jewish ancestry, the ability to survive was sometimes quite precarious in the Early Modern period. Early Modern rulers vacillated between allowing the open practice of the Jewish religion to persecuting, and, sometimes, killing those who had a distant Jewish ancestor, whether or not they were practicing the religion of Judaism. Laws could change quickly, and certainty about their position in any given city or nation was in short supply. Furthermore, there was often a strong bias against Jews and those of Jewish decent in the courts and among law-makers, even if Jewish settlement in a given place was permitted.¹ The Sephardic merchants in Amsterdam in the early years of their settlement in this city – from 1595 to 1620 – were acutely aware of their sometimes precarious position in the United Provinces.

In order to survive in the early Dutch Republic, the Sephardim had to protect not only their legal rights, but also their economic livelihood. In order to safeguard themselves, they used the business networks that they had forged with non-Sephardic merchants, most of whom were recent immigrants from the Southern Netherlands, to form effective lobbying groups. These networks were inter-cultural, meaning that they were comprised of merchants of varying backgrounds. They lobbied for various things, but they especially lobbied to ensure that their economic interests were acknowledged and respected by governing institutions. This article will first explore the formation of networks, in general, as a basic strategy of economic survival. Secondly, it will discuss inter-cultural networks, among the Sephardim and their non-Sephardic associates, specifically, and how these formed an alternative, but complementary, survival strategy. These inter-cultural networks were used not only for the actual conduct of trade,

¹ A note on terminology: there are multiple, often confusing, terms used, sometimes inaccurately and interchangeably, in relation to those with Jewish ancestors from Iberia. Throughout the rest of this work, the terms 'Sephardim', 'Sephardic Jews' in their broadest sense, to indicate Jews and New Christians of Iberian descent, will be used.

but also formed an interest group for the promotion of their common economic survival. The way in which this inter-cultural interest group lobbied for their joint benefits will be analyzed via a short case study. This case study highlights the effectiveness and the necessity of inter-cultural interest groups as a survival strategy in the early Dutch Republic.

(Inter-cultural) Networks and risk reduction

The term ‘network’ and ‘networks’ has been debated about in academic and popular literature, but what, exactly, is a network? At its core, a network is

a collection of actors that pursue repeated, enduring exchange relations with one another and, at the same time, lack a legitimate organizational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchange.²

Why would this collection of actors pursue repeated, enduring exchange relations with one another, though, especially when they lacked a legitimate organizational authority? The answer is that merchants had to grapple with the high-risk environment of trade in the Early Modern period, and networks formed a risk reduction strategy.³

² Joel M. Podolny and Karen L. Page, ‘Network forms of organization’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998) 57-76, there 59; there are, of course, various other definitions. Braudel’s conception of network focused on the geographical dispersion of networks by noting that a commercial network comprised a certain number of individuals or agents located at different points in a circuit or group of circuits. The cooperations, connections and communications among them ensured the continuity and prosperity of trade. Ferdinand Braudel, *Civilization and capitalism: 15th-18th century, vol. 2: the wheels of commerce* (London 1982); for Markovits, the circulatory flows within a given network reflect its dynamism. He writes, ‘[a network is] a structure through which goods, credit, capital and men circulate regularly across a given space which can vary enormously in terms of both size and accessibility. C. Markovits, *The global world of Indian merchants, 1750-1947: traders of sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge 2000) 25.

³ Much of the following description of the nature of risk in Early Modern trade is drawn from Peter Mathias, ‘Strategies for reducing risk by entrepreneurs in the Early Modern period’ in: C. Lesger and L. Noordegraaf ed., *Entrepreneurs and*

An Early Modern merchant might face what could be categorized as ‘natural’ risk. Goods ran the risk of being damaged or destroyed by flood, drought, or shipwreck. Part and parcel of these natural risks were the problems associated with technology, or the lack thereof. Communications were slow, and market conditions could change dramatically between the time an order was sent and the time the order arrived, usually via ship. Therefore, information was paramount to the conduct of trade in the Early Modern period, and it became important to have a partner or a trusted correspondent in a distant locale to keep an eye on market conditions there, as well as to receive and ship goods. It was important that this person be trustworthy and credible. Furthermore, war raged in various parts of the European continent, as well as in the colonies, which further increased the risk to merchants.

In addition to these very real perils, there was always an element of what could be termed ‘personal risk’ for Early Modern merchants. There was the constant underlying threat that another merchant could default on a loan, refuse to honor a bill of exchange, abscond with goods or money, or fail to deliver the promised merchandise or services, all of which could severely jeopardize the economic position of a merchant, or even drive him to bankruptcy. And, lastly, the legal, institutional, and political framework was weak, depending upon the location. Recourse to these institutions could be uncertain and costly.

Due to these sorts of risks, there was a high premium placed on trust engendered by personal knowledge of the other merchant, especially familiarity based on kinship or shared religion, ethnicity, and/or nationality. Family provided partners, capital, information, and the structure of business ventures. Merchants often preferred trading with relatives, because they were the people they knew best, and over whom a merchant could wield some amount of control by depending on sanctions within the family structure in order to enforce business commitments. As one historian put it:

Family-based networks built on trust among partners are thought to have supplied the most effective governance structure as a solution

entrepreneurship in Early Modern times. Merchants and industrialists within the orbit of the Dutch staple market (The Hague 1995) 5-24.

to principal/agent problems and curbing agency and transaction costs.⁴

Trade within a family group was, then, a risk reduction and survival strategy. An extension of these family networks was ethno-religious networks. The Amsterdam-based Sephardic merchants had such a network. They shared with one another the costs of transportation, the risks of insurance, and information on ways of circumventing whatever obstacles came their way.⁵ The Sephardim, then, maintained extensive networks that reached throughout Europe, West Africa, the Americas, and into Asia. They, by and large, practiced endogamous marriage, and formed social, charitable, and religious organizations based upon their religion and ethnicity. Yet, these very real networks formed within the group were not the entirety of their economic networks, which included non-Sephardic, non-Jewish merchants.

In fact, cross-cultural cooperation was necessary for Sephardic networks to thrive. These inter-cultural networks, composed of Sephardic merchants and non-Sephardic, non-Jewish, usually Dutch or Flemish traders, while by no means infallible, spread the risks inherent in the reliance on merchants from only one group. These networks were most likely set up as a sort of survival strategy in response to the failure of intra-group networks. In addition, they provided a means to gain access to new markets, sources of supply, credit, and political influence. While much could be said about the effectiveness of inter-cultural networks for the entry into new markets, finding new sources of supply, and the extension of credit, it is the way in which they helped influence the political process that will be examined in the rest of this article.

Inter-cultural interest groups, lobbying, and survival

During the early years of Sephardic settlement, there was an ongoing tension between those within the United Provinces who supported the Sephardic presence and, later, the toleration of the open practice of

⁴ Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, 'Introduction' in: Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlafits, en Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglau ed., *Diaspora entrepreneurial networks: four centuries of history* (Oxford 2005) 4.

⁵ Daniel Swetschinski, *Reluctant cosmopolitans: the Portuguese Jews of seventeenth-century Amsterdam* (London 2000) 159-160.

Judaism, and elements within the Dutch Republic who opposed it. As early as 1577-78, William the Silent had considered trying to attract Ashkenazi Jews to the Netherlands, but the reformed clergy opposed him.⁶

In 1597, the mayors of Amsterdam allowed Manoel Rodrigues Vega, a Sephardic merchant from Amsterdam, to purchase *poortersrecht*, or the right to citizenship. The following year, the mayors allowed other 'Portuguese' to purchase this privilege, as well. The resolution contained two stipulations, however. The purchasers had to be Christians and live an honest life, and they had to be warned that in the city of Amsterdam, no other religion could be practiced than the officially sanctioned Protestantism.⁷ Of course, this was the case for Catholics, as well. Unlike Catholic citizens of Amsterdam, however, the Sephardim were unable to serve in public office or to pass on their citizen's rights to their children.⁸ This underscores the low-level discrimination and, therefore, the uncertainty about their ability to remain in the city, that the Sephardim faced in Amsterdam.

This uncertainty may have been furthered due to the differences between the way in which politics was conducted in the Iberian Peninsula, where the majority of the Sephardim came from (or from cities ruled by the Iberian monarchs such as Antwerp), and in Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, power lay with the magistrates and not with a single ruler with whom the Sephardim could align their interests.⁹ Nevertheless, the Sephardim were able to overcome this difference and to turn it to their advantage. They did this by using their business connections and inter-cultural trade networks to lobby for their interests with the magistrates of the city. Thus, they were

⁶ J.H. Prins, 'Prince William of Orange and the Jews', *Zion* 12 (1950) 93-105 (article in Hebrew); see also Saulo W. Baron, *The social and religious history of the Jews*, vol. 15 (New York 1973) 17-19.

⁷ Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese nation: conversos and community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington 1997) 58; Jacob Zwarts, 'De eerste rabbijnen en synagogen van Amsterdam naar Achivalische Bronnen', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Genootschap voor de Joodsche Wetenschap in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1928) 147-271, 249; the legal status of the Sephardim in the Netherlands is discussed in depth in Arend H. Huussen, Jr. 'The Legal Position of Sephardi Jews in Holland, circa 1600' in: Joseph Michiman ed., *Dutch Jewish history: proceedings of the fifth symposium on the history of the Jews in the Netherlands*. Jerusalem, November 25-28, 1991, vol. 3 (Assen 1993) 19-41.

⁸ E.M. Koen, 'The earliest sources relating to the Portuguese Jews in the municipal archives of Amsterdam up to 1620', *Studia Rosenthaliana* (1970) 25-42, there 30.

⁹ Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese nation*, 54.

able to counterbalance the hostility of the Calvinist clergy in Amsterdam by gaining the support of the magistrates of that city.

A prime example of this is the Sephardic attempt to found their first synagogue in Amsterdam. In 1612, the Sephardim hatched plans to furnish and use a building as a synagogue.¹⁰ However, the Calvinist clergy protested vehemently. Under pressure from the clergy, the ruling council of Amsterdam passed a resolution against the synagogue. However, with the collusion of the magistrates of Amsterdam, some of whom were business partners of the Sephardim, a compromise was reached. The ownership of the building was officially transferred to a member of the ruling council of Amsterdam, one Nicolaes van Campen. Ironically, Van Campen was a Catholic and, therefore, was not officially supposed to hold a post in the Amsterdam city government.¹¹ Be that as it may, the Sephardim rented the building from Van Campen and went on with their worship.¹²

The sugar confiscation of 1602: a case study in inter-cultural lobbying

Traditional historiography is based on the nation-state and on narratives of national achievement. However, the nation-state arrived relatively late on the scene. Thus, an over-reliance on this paradigm tends to ignore the very real non-national influences of trade networks, whatever their composition, on political processes before the eighteenth century.¹³ The case of the synagogue highlighted briefly above demonstrates that the Sephardim were able to work around the hostility of some elements in Amsterdam, and

¹⁰ E.M. Koen, 'Notarial records relating to the Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam up to 1639', *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 1967-2001, nr. 524.

¹¹ It is possible that Nicolaes van Campen and members of his family were business associates of Sephardic merchants. There is one record from 1597 regarding Manoel Rodrigues Vega and a William van Campen, possibly a relative of Nicolaes, who underwrote a voyage to the Indies in which Vega had invested: *Studia Rosenthaliana* 17. There is another deed from 1608 concerning a bond and several bills of exchange which mentions a Van Campen. However, the first name is illegible: Gemeente Archief Amsterdam, Notarial Archives, 62/113v.

¹² Jacob Zwarts, 'De eerste rabbijnen' 209-16; E.M. Koen, 'Nicolaes van Campen als huiseigenaar van de Portugees-Israelitische synagogue', *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 58 (1971) *passim*.

¹³ Jonathan Israel, 'Diasporas Jewish and non-Jewish and the world maritime empires' in: Baghdiantz McCabe ed., *Diaspora entrepreneurial networks*, 3-26, 8.

parlayed the underlying tension between the clergy and the city magistrates to their own advantage. They were possibly able to do this due to contacts they had made via their inter-cultural trade networks. Therefore, McCabe's assertion that networks composed of differing groups, 'were building considerable political and economic spheres of influence for their own interests'¹⁴ certainly held true for the Sephardim. They actively sought to influence political decision-making in their favor.

In the case under consideration below, Sephardic merchants and their non-Sephardic associates joined together as an interest group to lobby for their mutual interests. An interest group will be defined here as

a group of individuals conscious of sharing a common concern, cooperating on the borders of power, and seeking to increase their own benefits through bargaining with a political system they accept and influence.¹⁵

The sugar they lobbied for was seized from three Portuguese ships sailing off the coast of Portugal as a prize of war by Dutch ships. They lobbied local authorities, as well as national institutions in order to have their sugar returned to them. Lobbying is, essentially, any attempt by an interest group to influence the outcome of political events.¹⁶

The facts of the case of the confiscation of a large amount of sugar owned by Sephardic merchants in Antwerp and Amsterdam are relatively

¹⁴ Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, 'Introduction' in: Baghdiantz McCabe e.a. ed., *Diaspora entrepreneurial networks*, xviii-xxx, xx; see also Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, 'Trading diaspora, state building and the idea of national interest', paper presented at 'Interactions: regional studies, global processes, and historical analysis', Library of Congress, Washington D.C., February 28-March 3, 2001: <http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/interactions/mccabe.html>, accessed 16 May 2008.

¹⁵ Alison Gilbert Olson, *Making the empire work: London and American interest groups, 1690-1790* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 1992) 2-3.

¹⁶ Jeffrey M. Berry, *The interest group society* (Boston 1984) 6; lobbying could be aimed at any institution of government, from the lowest to the highest bodies. Various tactics could fall under the rubric of 'lobbying,' but it was petitioning that was the main form of lobbying in the seventeenth century. In fact, submitting petitions was 'the most widespread and approved form of political activity in Early Modern Europe', Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban politics in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York 2000) 38.

straightforward.¹⁷ The Dutch and English had joined together in 1602 to try and impose a blockade on the Iberian Peninsula. This same year, Jacob van Wassenaer sailed to the Iberian coast with five Dutch ships in support of this English military expedition.¹⁸ On the 9th of July, 1602, Admiral Obdam captured three Portuguese ships laden with sugar at the mouth of the Tagus River outside Lisbon. A part of the booty was shared among the crew. The rest of the booty and, most importantly, the approximately 2500 chests of sugar from the unfortunate São Pedro, São Antonio and Nossa Senhora de Piedade, was loaded onto Dutch ships.¹⁹ The idea, apparently, was to hand the sugar over to the States General. The States General decided to have an inventory made to make sure that the bounty was shared between the Admiralty of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Holland's *Noorderkwartier* (the cities of Hoorn and Enkhuizen). Amsterdam was to get half and Rotterdam and Holland's *Noorderkwartier* would each get a quarter of the booty.²⁰

These plans were soon scuppered however. On August 31, Sephardic merchants from Amsterdam and Antwerp petitioned the State General for the release of a large number of cases of sugar carried in these ships; both sugar and ships, they stated, belonged to them and to their partners and relatives in the Netherlands and other countries.²¹ A legal controversy ensued concerning part of the shipment.

This formal protest to the States General made in August was made only by an interest group composed of Sephardic merchants. This interest group of merchants, however, were some of the best known and wealthiest of the Sephardic merchants in the Low Countries. Nicolas Rodrigues d'Evora, Duarte Ximenes and Antonio Faillero, along with Duarte Fernandes, Francisco Pinto de Britto, Hendrick Garcia, Manoel Rodrigues

¹⁷ This case is mentioned in passing in the following works: Victor Enthoven, *Zeeland en de opkomst van de Republiek. Handel en strijd in de Scheldedelta c. 1550-1621*, unpublished dissertation manuscript, Universiteit Leiden (1996) 188; Odette Vlessing, 'New light on the earliest history of the Amsterdam Portuguese Jews' in: Michiman ed., *Dutch Jewish history*, 43-75, there 57-58; Izak Prins, *De vestiging der Marranen in Noord-Nederland in de zestiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 1927) 184-192.

¹⁸ Jacob van Wassenaer was later to become Count of Wassenaer and was also Lord of Obdam. He was also later Lieutenant Admiral of Holland: H.H.P. Rijperman, *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal van 1576 tot 1609*, vol. 12, 1602-1603. ('s-Gravenhage 1950), part of the *Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën* (henceforth RGP), nrs. 96-100.

¹⁹ NL-HaNA (Nationaal Archief), States General, 1.01.04/9.277.

²⁰ RGP 92, nr. 211.

²¹ RGP 92, nr. 213.

Vega, and Fernando Mercado wrote a long and earnest representation of their case to the States General, and asked that their goods be returned to them, or, at the very least, protected until a final resolution of the case was reached.²²

The Sephardic merchants based their arguments to the States General on the *sauegardes* (safeguards) that had been provided to the 'Portuguese Nation' by the States General itself in the past.²³ The position of the 'Portuguese Nation' in the Republic was controlled by these safeguards given by the States General. The States General had drawn up these safeguards for the Portuguese Nation in order to attract their trade. The first safeguard was given in 1577 after the Pacification of Gent and Brussels. In 1581, after Philip II came to power in Portugal, which made the Sephardim officially Spanish subjects of Portuguese descent, this initial safeguard was strengthened. The States General gave a safeguard to all Portuguese who lived in the Dutch Republic or did business in the Republic or who were en route to do so. They were free to live and conduct trade in the Republic, and were free to come and go how and when they wanted. In essence, these initial documents allowed Portuguese merchants living in the United Provinces and elsewhere the right to trade freely by way of the Netherlands.²⁴

In 1588, after the fall of Antwerp, the safeguard was expanded to those Portuguese who lived in a neutral country or elsewhere outside the Republic. This meant, effectively, that the Portuguese and others could freely trade with the Dutch without fear that their goods or ships would be seized. A further strengthening of the safeguards was made in 1592 to include the Portuguese in Antwerp and others in 'enemy' territory.²⁵ In a resolution passed on the 20th of October 1600, after the general trade embargo of 1599, the States General decided further that the Portuguese

²² RGP 92, no. 280. This and all subsequent translations from the Dutch were done by the author.

²³ Though there is some difference and nuance between the terms 'Portuguese Nation' and 'Sephardim,' in this context, 'Portuguese Nation' is generally a euphemism for Sephardim.

²⁴ Prins, *De vestiging der Marranen*, 129-132, 155-159.

²⁵ See E.M. Koen, 'Duarte Fernandes, koopman van de Portugese natie te Amsterdam', *Studia Rosenthaliana* 2 (1968) 178-192, there 182-183. Copies of the safeguards can be found in NL-HaNA, Staten van Holland, 3.01.04.01/36/308-321.

could trade via Portugal to Brazil. Thus, the Sephardim were allowed to reclaim cargoes taken by Dutch privateers that belonged to family members in Lisbon and elsewhere. It was this resolution which they were depending on for the redemption of their sugar.

Within two weeks of the initial protest filed by the Sephardic merchants based on these safeguards and privileges, the Admiralty of Rotterdam had asked the States General for jurisdiction over the case, which the States General granted.²⁶ Eleven days later, on the 18th of September in 1602, the Admiralty of Rotterdam asked for permission to sell the seized goods. The Admiralty argued for a basic reinterpretation of the safeguard of 1592 and the resolution of 1600. They based their argument on a decree made by the States General on the 2nd of April 1599, which stated that all trade and transport to Spain and Portugal was forbidden. The Admiralty suggested that a differentiation be made between the Portuguese in Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Antwerp or other 'enemy' locations, and merchants, captains, ship-owners and crew from the Republic, in addition to the Portuguese and other merchants that lived in the Dutch Republic.²⁷

The Sephardic merchants opposed this. In their opinion, the 1599 decree had been superseded by the resolution of 1600. In response, the Sephardim turned to a sort of independent commission of Dutch jurists, probably having concluded that the Admiralty of Rotterdam and the States General had a great deal to gain financially by confiscating the sugar and paying little or no restitution on it. In this same month of October 1602, several well-known jurists gave the Portuguese written advice regarding this case.²⁸

Their opinion was that people or goods that were covered by the safeguards were not subject to confiscation. The Portuguese and their goods had repeatedly been given protection in the Republic, even after their Government was officially an enemy of the Republic. Furthermore, the safeguards had been expanded to include not only the Portuguese who lived in neutral lands, but also to include those who lived in 'enemy' lands. Therefore, their rights were inviolable. These jurists unanimously rejected the idea that the proclamation of the 2nd of April 1599 had annulled these

²⁶ RGP 92, no. 212.

²⁷ RGP 92, no. 213.

²⁸ RGP 92, no. 281. The jurists were: R. van Amstelredeam, H. du Weerd, A. Snoek, E. Dimmer, G. Hamel, A. Goes, I. Verweeren, C. van Buyck, I. van Dijk, P. van Veen, Baccart and Sib. Oillarts.

safeguards. General declarations had no connection with or influence on the Portuguese, according to the advisory committee, because they were already specially privileged. Therefore, based on the evidence offered, as well as on the precedents of Roman Law, for the well-being of the state of law in the United Provinces, the government of the Republic must, even if it would be contrary to the fiscal interests of the government, end the case as quickly as possible.²⁹

The States General might not have been moved as much by the appeals to Roman Law as they were to their own fiscal interests. Though the initial offer of the States General does not seem to be preserved, there must have been an offer for redemption of the sugar. This is known because the Sephardim responded on the 31st of October, 1602, that they did not want to take the offer given by the States General that they pay a fee of 250000 guilders to redeem all their sugar. They instead countered with an offer of 200000 guilders or they would ‘otherwise proceed with justice in court’.

It is at this point, perhaps fearing a loss in court, or wanting to avoid a protracted legal process themselves, that the Sephardim began to involve the other interested parties in their case. This sugar was not only owned by the aforementioned Sephardic merchants (as well as a few non-Sephardic merchants such as Cornelis Snellinck, who also represented other merchants involved in the case), but was insured by a number of Dutch merchants in Amsterdam and Middelburg. Thus, together they shared a common concern – their economic survival, as they would lose a great deal of money should the sugar be taken from them – and began to cooperate intensively. Their first step in advocating for their common interest was to turn to the most common form of lobbying in the seventeenth century – petitioning. Because the majority of the insurers lived in Amsterdam, as did many of the Sephardic merchants involved in the case, it was logical that the insurers should petition to the mayors of Amsterdam. In addition, Amsterdam held a great deal of power in the provincial and national assemblies. Thus, if Amsterdam supported their cause, they had a much greater chance of a favorable outcome to their case.

²⁹ Prins, *De vestiging der Marranen*, 129-132, 155-159.

Thirty-eight insurers addressed a petition to the mayors of Amsterdam in support of the Sephardic merchants.³⁰ The majority of these insurers were relatively recent immigrants from Antwerp and its environs, while Nicolas Rodrigues d'Evora, Duarte Ximenes and Antonio Faillero still lived in the city of Antwerp. Since neither the Sephardim nor the recent immigrants were eligible to hold public office, an important technique for exerting influence over the local political authorities was joining together for joint protests and cooperative petitions. The non-Sephardim had generally joined together with non-immigrant merchants who were native to Amsterdam.³¹ However, in this case, they cooperated with the Sephardim to exert their influence on the local magistracy.

In the petition, these merchants declared that they had 'insured the goods that had been confiscated for substantial sums of money.'³² They had done this,

based on their trust in the privileges and safeguards that the merchants of the Portuguese nation had received from the Gentlemen of the States General to trade and travel freely.

If the Admiralty allowed the bounty of the ships to be divided as a prize, then they, the petitioners who had insured these goods, would have to pay. The petition goes on to say that it would not just be they, the insurers, who suffered the material consequences should the confiscation go forward. Rather, it would be the whole Dutch Republic which would be negatively impacted. In sum, the insurers started out by appealing to the mayors based on their own material well-being which, they implied, would affect Amsterdam's trade as a whole. They then made reference to the legal basis upon which they had insured these goods. Lastly, they emphasized the importance of this case for the Republic as a whole.

This emphasis on the good of the Republic as a whole may seem exaggerated. However, the merchants petitioning the mayors of Amsterdam

³⁰ These 38 merchants were to become important associates of the Sephardim in Amsterdam in subsequent years. Close to 60% would do more business with Sephardic merchants.

³¹ Oscar Gelderblom, *Zuid-Nederlandse kooplieden en de opkomst van de Amsterdamse stapelmarkt (1578-1630)* (Hilversum 2000) 241.

³² The petition, from which excerpts are taken in the following pages, can be found in: NL-HaNA, Staten van Holland, 3.01.04.01/36/300-301.

pointed out that, should the confiscation proceed, the Sephardim would no longer feel safe to trade in the Republic. The trade of the Portuguese Nation, 'in these lands, of which there is much, is well-known [for its importance] by your honors.' This important trade, the petitioners insinuated, would move to other countries should this case go amiss for the Sephardim. Hamburg and Emden would receive the benefits from their trade instead of Amsterdam. Thus, with the importance of Sephardic trade firmly stated, and the possibility of the loss of the Sephardim to competing cities emphasized, the merchants went on to their ultimate request. This request was quite simple. They asked that

your honors, based on the aforementioned reasons . . . advocate for the [Sephardic merchants] with the Gentlemen of the States General so that the merchants of the Portuguese Nation and others of these lands can trade freely with Brazil, and that in the above-mentioned case [of the confiscation of the sugar] no [monetary] damage will be done to anyone involved.³³

The mayors of Amsterdam took the arguments and warnings of the insurers to heart. They sent a long and detailed request to the provincial assembly, the States of Holland, in which they exhaustively detailed the 200 year history of the Portuguese Nation in 'these lands.'³⁴ Assumedly, they were referring to Antwerp, and the two hundred years is, perhaps, an exaggeration. Nonetheless, the mayors of Amsterdam clearly wanted to emphasize the importance of the Sephardim. The mayors wrote that the Sephardim had conducted 'their business and trade to the great contentment, benefit, and profit of these Netherlands.' They then detailed all the safeguards that had been granted to the Portuguese Nation to place their judicial position on firm footing. They closed by urging that the provincial authorities support the mayors of Amsterdam and, by extension, the Sephardic merchants and their Dutch associates, in exhorting the States General to uphold the explicit promises to the Portuguese Nation made by the promulgation of the multiple safeguards in the sixteenth century. They also requested that the sugar be released.

The exact response of the provincial authorities to this request is not known. It seems that it was favorable, though not overly warm. The

³³ NL-HaNA, Staten van Holland, 3.01.04.01/36/305.

³⁴ NL-HaNA, Staten van Holland, 3.01.04.01/36/302-304.

provincial authorities of Holland appear to have sent on a copy of the resolution of 1600, which stated that ‘for the wealth of the land’ the Sephardim must be allowed to continue trading freely.³⁵ There is no other response or advocacy on the part of the provincial authorities that has, as of yet, been uncovered. However, the mayors of Amsterdam also sent a copy of the request they made to the States of Holland to the States General in order to lobby more effectively for the cause of the Sephardic merchants and their insurers.

On the 9th of November, another offer was made by the States General for a price to be paid for the redemption of the sugar.³⁶ For the first time, however, mention was made of the insurers of the cargo. It was suggested that the insurers be allowed to redeem the sugar for 100 daalders a chest. This mention of the insurers could be because the first official protest from the insurers had arrived to the States General. In addition to the Amsterdam-based insurers, various merchants from Middelburg had also insured part of the cargo for Duarte and Gonçalo Ximenes. They petitioned directly to the States General. The insurers declared that they had insured part of the cargo ‘for a great sum’. They gave the mark to be found on the chests of sugar that belonged to the Ximenes and requested that the matter be resolved within ten or twelve days.³⁷

Soon thereafter, the petitions from the Amsterdam insurers, with the support of the mayors of Amsterdam, and the tacit support of the provincial authorities in the form of a pointed reminder as to the resolution of 1600, must have been received by the States General. On the 12th of November, the States General began backtracking.³⁸ Once again, mention was made of the insurers of the cargo. The States General immediately released 562 chests of sugar, which could be claimed by merchants and insurers definitively living in Amsterdam and Antwerp. This sudden about face on the part of the States General, especially given the chronology of events, is hard to interpret in any other way than as a concession to mounting pressure from the interest group composed of the Sephardic merchants and their Dutch insurers, who had lobbied successfully for local and provincial support for their cause.

³⁵ NL-HaNA, Staten van Holland, 3.01.04.01/36/305.

³⁶ RGP 92, nr. 284.

³⁷ RGP 92, nr. 282, note 3.

³⁸ RGP 92, nr. 285.

In less than a month, more pressure came to bear on the States General for the release of more chests of sugar. On the 6th of December, several more prominent Dutch merchants urged the States General to resolve the matter of the rest of the approximately 2000 cases of sugar as quickly as possible.³⁹ Pieter Eeuwoutsz. wrote on behalf of Manoel Fernandes de Leon and Isaac d'Ablijn was representing the interests of Gaspar Fernandes. These merchants could have been living in 'enemy' territory, and, therefore, sought to have a Dutch merchant represent their claims, hoping that they would then have a better chance of a favorable outcome. Dirck Reysiender wrote on behalf of Gillis Dodeur, his nephew. It is not clear if Dodeur owned some of the sugar or if he was, instead, an insurer. The States General declared that it wanted to 'end this business quickly and, therefore, save the Republic money and themselves from further concern in the matter.'

It was not yet resolved on the 17th of January, 1603, when Cornelis Snellinck and Hendrik Ulens, as factors for Nicolas and Simon d'Evora wrote and requested a resolution to the matter.⁴⁰ Nor was it resolved the following week, on the 23rd of January, when Duarte Fernandes, Francisco Pinto de Britto and Duarte Ximenes strongly requested that a decision be reached.⁴¹ Perhaps a resolution had already been agreed upon, or it could be that these latest volleys from the interest group were the final straw for the States General. In any case, on the 25th of January, the cases of sugar were released. The precise amount that the Sephardim paid for the redemption of their sugar is unclear, but it is certainly less than the States General had initially demanded.

Conclusion

There is a great deal that is unclear about this case. The legal documents can be difficult to understand and further research needs to be done. What is clear about the case is that the Sephardim and their Dutch associates shared a common concern – their economic survival. Should the sugar be sold by the Admiralty, the Sephardim would lose the profits they could make on the

³⁹ RGP 92, nr. 286. It is unclear exactly how many cases of sugar there were. Some of the documentation seems to point to more than 2500 cases.

⁴⁰ RGP 92, p. 610.

⁴¹ RGP 92, p. 610.

sale of this expensive luxury good. The insurers would have to pay the agreed upon rate for the sugar, and, thereby, lose great sums of money in the process. Thus, they cooperated with one another for the furtherance of their collective goals.

The Sephardim and their Dutch associates shared a common concern – the restitution of the sugar, their own profits, and their economic survival. They cooperated for the furtherance of these goals by coordinating their lobbying efforts with local authorities in Amsterdam, provincial authorities and, ultimately, national government institutions. They bargained by going back and forth with the price they found acceptable to pay. Moreover, they exerted pressure on the political decision makers by reminding them again and again of the benefits the Portuguese Nation brought to the Dutch Republic. Lastly, they quite explicitly threatened that the Sephardim would leave the Dutch Republic and go to a competing land should they not feel safe to trade. Together they worked as a cross-cultural interest group to lobby for restitution – an interest group that seems to have been quite effective.