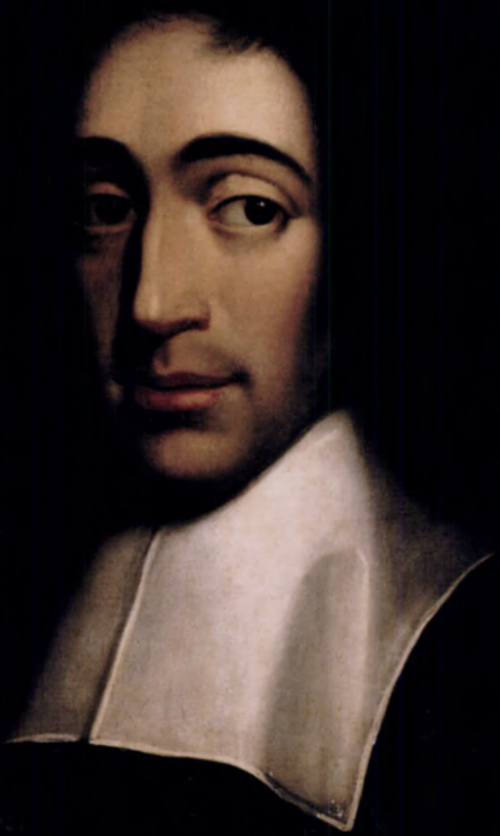
SPINOZA

A LIFE



STEVEN NADLER

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Preface

Baruch de Spinoza (1632–77) was the son of a prominent merchant in Amsterdam's Portuguese-Jewish community. He was also among the more gifted students in its school. But something happened around his twenty-third year – whether it was sudden or gradual, we do not know – that led to the harshest excommunication ever proclaimed by the leaders of the Amsterdam Sephardim. The result was Spinoza's departure from the community – indeed, from Judaism entirely. He would go on to become one of the most important and famous philosophers of all time, and certainly the most radical and controversial of his own.

The young man's transformation (if that's what it was) from ordinary Jewish boy – living, to all appearances, a perfectly normal orthodox life and remarkable perhaps only for his intelligence – to iconoclastic philosopher is, unfortunately, hidden from us, possibly forever. We have only the *cherem* document, full of oaths and maledictions, that was composed by the community's governors. There is so little surviving material, so little that is known for certain about the details of Spinoza's life, particularly before 1661 (when his extant correspondence begins), that we can only speculate on his emotional and intellectual development and on the more mundane matters that fill out a person's existence. But what a rich field for speculation it is, particularly given the fascination of its subject.

Metaphysical and moral philosopher, political and religious thinker, biblical exegete, social critic, grinder of lenses, failed merchant, Dutch intellectual, Jewish heretic. What makes Spinoza's life so interesting are the various, and at times opposing, contexts to which it belongs: the community of Portuguese and Spanish immigrants, many of them former "marranos," who found refuge and economic opportunity in the newly independent Dutch Republic; the turbulent politics and magnificent culture of that young nation which, in the middle of the seventeenth century, was experiencing its so-called Golden Age; and, not the least, the history of philosophy itself.

As a Jew, even an apostate one, Spinoza was always, to a certain extent, an outsider in the Calvinist land in which he was born and from which, as far as we know, he never traveled. But after his excommunication from the Talmud Torah congregation and his voluntary exile from the city of his birth, Spinoza no longer identified himself as a Jew. He preferred to see himself as just another citizen of the Dutch Republic – and perhaps, as well, of the transnational Republic of Letters. He nourished himself not only on the Jewish traditions to which he had been introduced in the synagogue's school, but also on the philosophical, theological, and political debates that so often disturbed the peace of his homeland's first hundred years. His legacy, of course, was as great as his appropriation. In many respects, the Dutch Republic was still groping for its identity during Spinoza's lifetime. And as much as Spinoza's Dutch contemporaries reviled and attacked him, there can be no denying the significance of the contribution that he made to the development of Dutch intellectual culture. It is, perhaps, as great a contribution as that which he made to the development of the character of modern Judaism.

This is the first full-length and complete biography of Spinoza ever to appear in English. It is also the first to be written in any language in quite a long time. There have, of course, been short studies of one aspect or another of Spinoza's life, and practically every book on Spinoza's philosophy begins with a brief biographical sketch. But the last substantial attempt to put together a complete "life" of Spinoza was Jacob Freudenthal's *Spinoza: Sein Leben und Sein Lehre* at the beginning of this century.[1] A great deal of research into the history of Amsterdam's Portuguese Jews and on Spinoza himself has been done since Freudenthal published his valuable study, however. As a result of the enormously important work of scholars such as A. M. Vaz Dias, W. G. Van der Tak, I. S. Revah, Wim Klever, Yosef Kaplan, Herman Prins Salomon, Jonathan Israel, Richard Popkin, and a host of others, enough material has come to light over the last sixty years about Spinoza's life and times, and about the Amsterdam Jewish community in particular, that any earlier biography is, essentially, obsolete. And I should make it clear for the record that, without the labors of those individuals, this book could never have been written. I can only hope that I have made good use of their work.

Let the scholarly reader beware: it was not my intention to track down and present the various sources of Spinoza's thought, all the possible thinkers and traditions that may have influenced him. That would be an infinite task, one that no individual could accomplish in a lifetime. This is, in other words, most definitely not an "intellectual" biography. At certain points it was important – indeed, essential – for me to look closely at what seemed to be Spinoza's intellectual development. But I make no claims for exhaustiveness in my research on his philosophical origins. Nor is this a study of Spinoza's philosophy. Books and articles on his metaphysical and other doctrines are a dime a dozen, and I had no desire to add to the growing bibliography of literature for specialists. Rather, I have tried to provide the general reader with an accessible overview of Spinoza's ideas. If I appear to some Spinoza scholars to be guilty at times of simplification or distortion, then I plead nolo contendere: I do not want to pick any academic fights on the finer details of Spinozism. Let that be for a different time and place. What I am interested in – and what I hope my reader is interested in – is the life and times and thoughts of an important and immensely relevant thinker.

The question that lies at the heart of this biography is how did the various aspects of Spinoza's life – his ethnic and social background, his place in exile between two such different cultures as the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish community and Dutch society, his intellectual development, and his social and political relationships – come together to produce one of history's most radical thinkers? But there is another, more general question that interests me as well: what did it mean to be a philosopher and a Jew in the Dutch Golden Age? The quest for answers to these questions must begin almost two hundred years earlier, in another part of Europe.

mass baptisms were held to their new religion. Any attempt to return openly to Judaism or to continue Jewish practices in secret was considered heresy.

During the early decades of the fifteenth century, there was renewed anti-Jewish activity, now more systematically inspired by the yearning to compel the Jews to admit the truth of the Christian faith. In 1414, there was a particularly large number of mass conversions. Once an individual converted, he fell within the domain of Christian ecclesiastical authority. Conversos were under the constant scrutiny of the church, whose officers were always concerned with the spiritual condition of the members of their flock (regardless of the circumstances under which those members joined up). The lack of organized Jewish resistance only incited further violence, as one community after another fell to the onslaught. This time the kings, who were desperately seeking to save the backbone of their economies, tried to intervene and put an end to the persecutions. But the damage had been done. By the middle of the century, Spain's Jewish population was decimated, its remnants demoralized. The vibrant life and culture – not to mention the productivity – of the Jewish community was gone; its "Golden Age" was over.

The Jews called the conversos *anusim* ("forced ones") or *meshummadim* ("converted ones"). A more derogatory term, used primarily by Christians to refer to those whom they suspected of being secret Judaizers, was *marranos*, or "swine." Many conversos undoubtedly became true and sincere Christians. Some, on the other hand, probably did continue to observe some form of Judaism in secret.[1] These Judaizing "New Christians" grew adept at hiding their practices, and it became difficult for observers (or spies) to grasp the reality behind the appearance of conversion. Consequently, "Old Christians" always suspected conversos of insincerity in the faith. Conversos were constantly being harassed by the general populace; soon, they would also find themselves cruelly persecuted by the Inquisition.

The situation for Jews and conversos continued to deteriorate after the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469 and the union of their two kingdoms in 1479. The royal couple passionately pursued religious unity and orthodoxy in Spain, and thus kept a watchful eye on their converso population. Hoping to isolate conversos from the pernicious influence of Jews who might attempt to persuade them to return to Judaism, they adopted a policy of segregating Jews from Christian communities. In 1478, Pope Sixtus IV granted Ferdinand and Isabella the power to appoint Inquisitors in Castile. Over the next twelve years, the Spanish Inquisition claimed to have discovered – invariably through violent and irresistible means – over 13,000 Judaizing conversos. (Naturally, the Inquisition tended to leave professed Jews alone, as its concern extended only to heretics and not to infidels.)

In 1492, after the elimination of Moslem control in Granada, the Christian reconquest of Spanish soil was complete. With the "Moslem problem" well in hand, the monarchs and their ecclesiastic allies were free to turn all their attention to the Jews. This would be the final stage in their project of national religious uniformity. On March 31, 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella signed an expulsion order covering all the territories under the crowns of Castile and Aragon, "to prevent Jews from influencing conversos and to purify the Christian faith."

> We have been informed that within our kingdom there are evil Christians who have converted to Judaism and who have thereby betrayed our holy Catholic faith. This most unfortunate development has been brought about as a result of the contact between Jews and Christians. . . . We have decided that no further opportunities should be given for additional damage to our holy faith. . . . Thus, we hereby order the expulsion of all Jews, both male and female, and of all ages, who live in our kingdom and in all the areas in our possession, whether such Jews have been born here or not. . . . These Jews are to depart from our kingdoms and from all the areas in our possession by the end of July, together with their Jewish sons and daughters, their Jewish servants and their Jewish relatives. . . . Nor shall Jews be permitted to pass through our kingdoms and through all the areas in our possession en route to any destination. Jews shall not be permitted in any manner whatsoever to be present in any of our kingdoms and in any of the areas in our possession.

The Jews were, in fact, given a choice: conversion or exile. Within months there were, officially, no more Jews in Spain.

The majority of the exiles (about 120,000) went to Portugal. Others left for North Africa, Italy, and Turkey. The Jews who remained behind in Spain converted to Christianity, as the law required. But their life as conversos was no easier than their life as Jews. They continued to suffer at the hands of their incredulous Old Christian neighbors, and were now harassed by the Inquisition as well. Many must have regretted not having joined the exodus.

For those who did choose exile, Portugal proved to be a safe haven of brief duration. On December 5, 1496, Manuel, the ruler of Portugal, issued a royal decree banishing Jews and Moslems from his realm. His motive ostensibly was to expedite his marriage to Isabella, the daughter of the Spanish monarchs. But Manuel was less short-sighted than his future in-laws. He recognized that whatever immediate gain would result from expulsion (including the confiscation of Jewish wealth) would be offset by a greater long-term loss. Thus, to make sure that the financiers and traders remained a part of his economy, he decided that forced conversion was to be the only option offered the Jews. On March 4, 1497, he ordered all Jewish children to be presented for baptism. There was as yet no Inquisition in Portugal, and many of these new conversos – their numbers increasing due to continued converso flight from the Spanish Inquisition – were able to Judaize in secret with minimal difficulty. For a while, the marranos of Portugal enjoyed a degree of toleration (although they were officially forbidden to leave the country), and this fostered a rather strong crypto-Jewish tradition.

The reprieve did not last long. In 1547, a "free and unimpeded Inquisition" was fully established in Portugal by papal order. By the 1550s, persecution of conversos suspected of Judaizing – and what converso escaped such suspicion? – was in full force, paralleling the situation in Spain. The Portuguese Inquisition, in fact, proved to be even harsher than its Spanish counterpart, particularly after the union of the two nations under one crown in 1580. Many conversos started emigrating back to Spain, where they hoped to blend in with some anonymity and, perhaps, recapture their former prosperity. Conversos returning from Portugal, however, were under an especially strong suspicion of being Judaizers, and this inspired the Spanish Inquisition to pursue its task with even greater zeal.

Throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, as the Inquisitions in Portugal and then Spain grew increasingly more ruthless, there was a marked increase in converso flight from the Iberian peninsula altogether. A good number of refugees went to northern Europe. Some directly departed from Portugal, while others went north only after a temporary sojourn in Spain. Still other emigrants came from those families which had never left Spain in the first place. Among these sixteenth-century exiles there must have been many Judaizers, remnants or descendants of those who were so committed to the Jewish faith that they chose exile over conversion in 1492 and then surreptitiously continued to practice their religion in Portugal. They now trekked to the outer reaches of the Spanish Empire in the hope that there the power and influence of the Inquisition would be weaker. Having refused to become sincere and inwardly conforming Christians in either Portugal or Spain, they sought a more tolerant environment where, even if they could not live openly as Jews, they could nonetheless practice their religion in secret without the constant harassment they faced in Iberia.[2]

Portuguese conversos started settling in the Low Countries as early as 1512, when they were all still under Hapsburg control. Most of them went to Antwerp, a bustling commercial center that afforded the New Christians great economic opportunities and whose citizens perceived the financial advantage of admitting these well-connected merchants. In 1537, the Holy Roman emperor Charles V (also Charles I of Spain and ruler of the Netherlands) officially gave his permission for this immigration to continue as long as the New Christians did not revert openly to Judaism or even Judaize in secret. Although he was later forced to issue an edict banning New Christians from settling in his northern domains, it was never strongly enforced. By the 1570s, Antwerp had a converso community numbering around five hundred. Most of the Portuguese in Antwerp were probably not Judaizers, but many undoubtedly were.

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There is not much reliable information on the founding and earliest development of a truly Jewish community in Amsterdam.[3] The dates usually given by historians for the initial settlement of Amsterdam's Jews range between 1593 and 1610. What makes this question especially difficult to resolve with any certainty is the number of myths that surround the arrival of the first Portuguese New Christian immigrants in Holland.

Two stories in particular stand out. According to one account, whose events are variously dated between 1593 and 1597, the English, who were then at war with Spain, intercepted a ship carrying a number of New Christian refugees fleeing Portugal. Among the passengers was the "strikingly beautiful Maria Nuñes" and some of her relatives. The ship and its cargo were seized and brought back to England. The duke who was commanding the British fleet immediately fell in love with Maria. After they reached port, he asked for her hand in marriage, but she refused. Queen Elizabeth heard about the affair and ordered the young woman to be brought into her presence. She, too, was struck by Maria's beauty and grace, and promenaded her about London high society. Despite generous promises and amorous entreaties, all designed to entice her to stay in England, the brave and steadfast Maria insisted on continuing her journey to the Low

Countries, where she intended to convert back to Judaism. The queen finally relented and gave her and her companions safe passage to Holland. In 1598, after the arrival from Portugal of her mother, her sister, Justa, and two older brothers, Maria married her cousin, Manuel Lopes, in Amsterdam. Thus the establishment of the first converso (and possibly Jewish) household in Amsterdam.[4]

A second tale more explicitly involves the introduction of Jewish observance into Amsterdam. Around 1602, the story runs, two ships arrived in Emden in East Friesland bearing a number of Portuguese marranos and their possessions. The refugees disembarked and, after walking through the town, came upon a house with a Hebrew motto (which they could not read) written above the door: *'emet veshalom yesod ha'olam* ("Truth and peace are the foundation of the world"). After some inquiring, they learned that this was the home of a Jew, Moses Uri Halevi. They went back to Halevi's house and tried to communicate with him in Spanish, which he did not understand. Halevi called in his son Aaron, who knew the language. The visitors told him that they were recently arrived from Portugal and wished to be circumcised because "they were children of Israel." Aaron responded that he could not perform the ceremony in a Lutheran city such as Emden. He directed them to go to Amsterdam, where they were to rent a particular house in the Jonkerstraat. He said that he and his father would soon follow them there. Several weeks later, Moses and Aaron Halevi found the group in Amsterdam, circumcised the men, and led them in regular Jewish services.

It did not take the Amsterdam authorities long, however, to become suspicious of this secret, unfamiliar activity taking place in their Protestant city. One Friday evening, neighbors reported the sounds of a strange language emanating from the house in which the Jews were praying during a Shabbat service. The sheriff's deputies, Calvinists one and all, and convinced that the unfamiliar sounds must be Latin, burst into the house expecting to find a mass surreptitiously being celebrated. The gathering was broken up, and Moses and Aaron Halevi were arrested. They were soon released, however, when the matter was cleared up by a fellow Portuguese resident, Jacob Tirado (alias Jaimes Lopes da Costa). Tirado explained that they were in fact Jews, not Catholics, and that the strange sounds were Hebrew, not Latin. Tirado also pointed out to the authorities the economic benefits to Amsterdam of having a Jewish community established there. The appeal succeeded, and Tirado was granted permission to set up a congregation, with Moses Halevi as its rabbi.[5]

Rodriguez Vega came to Amsterdam from Antwerp around 1590. He is identified in notarial records in 1595 as a "merchant of Amsterdam," and two years later he was able to buy his citizenship. He was, by the early 1600s, a major figure in the Portuguese Jewish community's economic life, trading in sugar, wood, cloth, grain, salt, spices, metals, and fruit, with business in Brazil, England, Portugal, Morocco, and various cities and principalities in the German lands. He even had some business dealings with the Spinoza family. In 1596, he authorized Emanuel Rodriguez de Spinoza (alias Abraham de Spinoza, the great-uncle of Baruch), then living in Nantes, France, to reclaim a cargo of textile goods that had been seized by Spanish soldiers.[10] It was the wealth and international connections of men like Rodriguez Vega that made possible the establishment and rapid growth of the Portuguese community.

Tirado, on the other hand, is often credited with being one of the prime movers of Jewish worship in Amsterdam (where he lived until 1612, when he emigrated to Palestine). There is no reason to believe that any of the marranos in the United Provinces showed their true Jewish colors until around 1603, and then they did so slowly and cautiously. That is the year Halevi and his son are supposed to have arrived in Amsterdam to perform circumcisions and, according to records, to serve as *schochetim*, or ritual slaughterers. Tirado seems to have been in contact with Halevi, and not just for business purposes. He may, around this time, have been organizing Jewish services in his house and actively (but quietly) encouraging others to join in.[11]

Two cities in the United Provinces were, in fact, explicitly willing to admit Jews and allow them to practice their religion openly: Alkmaar, in 1604, and Haarlem, in 1605 (although the burgemeesters of Haarlem put so many conditions on their offer that it effectively prevented any Jewish community from developing there).[12] Portuguese petitioners came to Haarlem from Amsterdam, apparently hoping to bargain for a greater degree of religious liberty than they had in Amsterdam. This suggests that by 1605 at the latest Jewish services were being held in Amsterdam with some regularity – in private, to be sure, but probably known and tolerated by the authorities.[13] Portuguese Jews were organized and open enough about their Judaism to make a request for burial grounds within the municipal boundaries in 1606 and again in 1608, a request the city of Amsterdam denied.[14]

The first organized congregation in Amsterdam was called "Beth Jacob",[15] in honor of Jacob Tirado. In 1609, Joseph Pardo arrived from Venice with his son David to become their rabbi. In 1608, a second congregation was formed, Neve Shalom ("Dwelling of Peace").[16] Their first rabbi was Judah Vega, from Constantinople. Thus, by 1614, the year the Portuguese Jewish community was finally able to purchase some land close to Amsterdam – in Ouderkerk – to serve as a burial ground, there were two well-attended congregations. Beth Jacob continued to meet in Tirado's home until around 1614, when they began renting an old warehouse (called "The Antwerpen") on the Houtgracht. Neve Shalom met for a time at the house of Samuel Palache, Morocco's Jewish ambassador to the Netherlands. The members of Neve Shalom tried to build a synagogue in 1612 (also on the Houtgracht), and to this end hired a local Dutch builder, Han Gerritsz, with the stipulation that no construction work should take place between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday. The city authorities, however, at the insistence of Calvinist preachers (who were growing increasingly nervous at the presence of a burgeoning Jewish community in their midst), forbade the Jews to furnish and use the building. From 1616 onward, Neve Shalom had to make do with a house rented from a prominent Dutch burgher. When he died in 1638, his wife sold the house to the congregation.[17]

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The rapport between the Jews and the Dutch in the first quarter of the seventeenth century was uneasy: each side recognized the economic and political value of their relationship, but also regarded the other with a certain degree of suspicion. It is not surprising that it took a long time for the Portuguese community to lose the feeling of insecurity that one would naturally expect to find among a group of persecuted refugees dependent on the goodwill of their hosts for protection. Indeed, the city of Amsterdam was slow in granting formal recognition to the Jews as a religious community with the right to practice their religion openly and to live according to their laws, although it clearly tolerated the existence of "secret" (that is, discreet) worship. In 1615, when the States General – the central legislative organ of the United Provinces as a whole, made up of representatives from each province – authorized resident Jews to practice their religion, Amsterdam was still forbidding public worship. In the same year, the States of Holland – the governing body of that province, composed of delegations from eighteen towns, along with a delegation representing the nobility – set up a commission to advise them on the problem of the legal status of the Jews. The commission consisted of Adriaan Pauw and the great jurist Hugo Grotius, the pensionaries or chief legal advisers of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, respectively. While Grotius and Pauw deliberated, the municipal authorities of Amsterdam issued, in 1616, a warning to the "Jewish nation." Among other things, the Jews were ordered to refrain from criticizing the Christian religion, not to attempt to convert Christians to Judaism, and not to have sexual relations with Christians. Behind the ordinance lay the machinations of the local Calvinist consistory, which was clearly unhappy about seeing yet another religious "sect" take up residence in the land. The clergy redoubled their efforts when they learned of various amorous affairs (some of them adulterous) between Jewish men and Christian women and of a number of conversions from Christianity to Judaism.[18] Still, relations between the Jews and the citizens of the city of Amsterdam were tranquil enough for Rabbi Uziel to write, also in 1616, that "at present people live peaceably in Amsterdam. The inhabitants of this city, mindful of the increase in population, make laws and ordinances whereby the freedom of religions may be upheld." He adds that "each may follow his own belief, but may not openly show that he is a different faith from the inhabitants of the city."[19]

In 1619, after having studied drafts of ordinances submitted by the ad hoc commission, the States of Holland rejected the restrictions on Jewish–Dutch relations recommended by Grotius[20] and concluded that each town should decide for itself whether and under what conditions to admit Jews. They added that if a town did decide to accept Jews, though it could assign them a special residential quarter, it could not compel them to wear any special marks or clothing. Even Grotius, despite his misgivings and his concerns to safeguard the interests of the Reformed Church, conceded that for theological and moral (not to mention practical) reasons Holland should give the Jews the refuge they sought and the hospitality they deserved: "Plainly, God desires them to live somewhere. Why then not here rather than elsewhere? . . . Besides, the scholars among them may be of some service to us by teaching us the Hebrew language." That same year, the Amsterdam city council followed suit and officially granted the Jews of Amsterdam the right to practice their religion, with some restrictions on their economic and political rights and various rules against intermarriage and certain social activities with Christians.[21] The council also demanded that the Jews keep to a strict observance of their orthodoxy, adhering scrupulously to the Law of Moses and never tolerating deviations from the belief that there is "an omnipotent God the creator . . . [and] that Moses and the prophets revealed the truth under divine inspiration, and that there is another life after death in which good people will receive their recompense and wicked people their punishment." It was not until 1657 – nine years after Spain, with the signing of the Treaty of Münster, conceded official recognition to the sovereignty of the Dutch Republic – that the States General actually proclaimed that Dutch Jews were subjects of the republic and thus entitled to its protection in their travels abroad and business dealings with foreign firms or governments. Prior to this, they were still a "foreign group."[22]

Some of the difficulties in the relationship between the Jews and the Dutch, particularly the opposition among the Calvinist clergy to formally granting the Jews the right to practice their religion, have their source in the religious controversy that raged within the Dutch Reformed Church during the second and third decades of the seventeenth century.[23] It is likely that at least part of the reason for Amsterdam's resistance to recognizing the Jews were the strong conservative theological tendencies in the city at that time and the power exercised there by the Calvinist *predikanten* and their allies.

In 1610, a group of forty-four ministers, all followers of Jacobus Arminius, a liberal theology professor at the University of Leiden, issued a "Remonstrance" in which they set forth their unorthodox views on certain sensitive theological questions. Anticipating the impending reaction, they also asked the States of Holland for protection. The Arminians, or "Remonstrants," explicitly rejected the strict Calvinist doctrines of grace and predestination. They believed that a person had the capacity to contribute, through his actions, to his own salvation. They also favored a separation between matters of conscience and matters of political power, and distrusted the political ambitions of their orthodox opponents. Like many religious reformers, the Arminians saw their crusade in moral terms. In their eyes, the true spirit of the Reformation had been lost by the increasingly dogmatic, hierarchical, and intolerant leaders of the Reformed Church.[24] The Remonstrants had on their side Johan Oldenbarneveldt, the Advocate or political adviser (later called the "Grand Pensionary") of the States of Holland, the most important and powerful office in the republic after the Stadholder, whose own domain extended to several provinces. (The stadholder was also the commander-in-chief of all Dutch military forces and, by tradition, a symbol of Dutch unity; the post was traditionally given to a member of the House of Orange/Nassau.) With the Advocate's intervention, what was initially a doctrinal dispute within the Calvinist Church and the university faculties quickly took on political overtones. The States of Holland, urged on by Oldenbarneveldt, granted the Remonstrants their demands, which in effect served only to solidify opposition to the Remonstrant cause. The Counter-Remonstrant theologians accused the Arminians of papism – an accusation that the Remonstrants threw right back at them[25] – while Oldenbarneveldt's political enemies, of which there were many, saw in his support for the liberals an opportunity to label him a traitor who was working on behalf of Spain, their Catholic enemy. Over time, the Remonstrant/Counter-Remonstrant battle over theology became intertwined with opposing views on domestic affairs (such as whether civil authorities had the right to legislate over the church and to control what it taught) and foreign policy (especially how to conduct the war with Spain and how to respond to the recent Protestant uprisings in Catholic France). For a while, Amsterdam was a stronghold of Counter-Remonstrant activity, the town's regents choosing to side with the local orthodox ministers, mainly out of political expediency. There was frequent, and sometimes quite violent, persecution of Remonstrants. Many of them were stripped of their offices and perquisites. By 1617, the Stadholder himself, Prince Maurits of Nassau, entered the fray on the Counter-Remonstrant side. This was a purely political move by the prince, part of his opposition to Oldenbarneveldt's policies of seeking peace with Spain and staying out of French affairs.

The Synod of Dort, a meeting of Dutch Reformed ministers from all the provinces, was convened from November of 1618 to May of 1619 to consider the Remonstrant issue. The synod ultimately resolved to expel the Remonstrants from the Calvinist Church. The representatives to the synod reiterated their commitment to freedom of conscience but nonetheless insisted that public worship and office holding be restricted to orthodox Calvinists. There was a purge of the church at all levels. Meanwhile, Oldenbarneveldt was convicted of treason and beheaded. The harassment of Remonstrants continued for a number of years, although by the mid-1620s things had quieted down somewhat. Amsterdam itself eventually gained a reputation as a city favorable to Remonstrants.[26]

The consequences of this crisis within Calvinism for the Jews of the Dutch Republic were both material and psychological. Certainly, any backlash against those who were not strict Calvinists would hit not just Reformed of marrano, having been compelled to hide her Jewishness from her husband, the Persian king Ahasuarus. She finally revealed herself in order to save her people from the evil plot of the king's minister, Haman.[32]

For these reasons, the earliest Jews of Amsterdam required outside guidance for their reintegration into the Judaism from which they and their ancestors had been removed for so long. The story of how the Ashkenazim from Emden, Moses and Aaron Halevi, helped the first group of Portuguese merchants return to Jewish practice is only the most legendary instance of this. Most of the leading rabbis of the Amsterdam Portuguese Jews in the first half of the seventeenth century came from outside the community. Joseph Pardo had been born in Salonika but was living in Venice when he left to serve as rabbi for Beth Jacob. He did much to reeducate that congregation's members in Sephardic rites; whatever Halevi might have taught them would have been Ashkenazic in character. Neveh Shalom imported, first, Judah Vega, from Constantinople, followed in 1616 by Isaac Uziel from Fez, Morocco. Uziel, in turn, trained Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, both of marrano background (from Madeira and Portugal, respectively). The most important rabbi of the community in the period, Saul Levi Mortera, was not even Sephardic. Born into an Ashkenazic family in Venice, he arrived in Amsterdam in 1616 and became head rabbi of Beth Jacob two years later. These rabbis, or *chachamim* ("wise men") of non-converso background corrected or abolished altogether various practices that they deemed inconsistent with Jewish tradition, and they supervised the conformity of the community's activities with halachic (legal) requirements. Pardo, for example, prohibited the members of Beth Jacob from gathering in the synagogue on the three Saturdays preceding the ninth of Ab to mourn the destruction of the Temple, as they were wont to do, because (he argued) this violated the holiness of the Sabbath day.[33]

Venice played an important normative role in this process of organizing and rectifying the Amsterdam *kehillah.* The Venetian Sephardic community – one of the largest and most prosperous of its day and the most important for marrano refugees seeking to return to Judaism – not only supplied rabbis for their northern coreligionists, but also served as a model for the internal order of the newer community. Right from the start, Beth Jacob and Neve Shalom adopted the Venetian structure of authority, whereby real power in the congregation was vested not in the rabbis but in the lay governors. The governing board regulated political, business, judicial, and even religious affairs – everything from the butchering and sale of kosher meat to excommunicating people for moral or religious offenses. The power of the rabbi was, at least de jure, rather narrowly defined. He was technically a salaried official working for the governing board and was to serve mainly as a spiritual leader and teacher.

This arrangement did not always run smoothly. In 1618–19, a conflict over the division of power split apart one of the congregations. The exact origin of the dispute is not entirely clear. It involved various charges made against one David Farar, a physician, one of the leaders of the Beth Jacob congregation and a man with a reputation for being a liberal, even (at least according to his opponents) a freethinker. On one observer's account of the schism, Farar was accused of having appointed as *schochet* a man whom the rabbis subsequently concluded was unqualified for the job; Farar reportedly refused to remove him.[34] According to another witness, what was at issue were various heterodox opinions – about the interpretation of biblical texts and the practical efficacy of kabbalah – that Farar was alleged to have been propounding. (The affair over the *schochet,* on this second view, concerned not Farar himself but his father-in-law, Abraham Farar).[35] Farar was denounced (or perhaps even put under a ban, or *cherem*) by Joseph Pardo, the rabbi of Beth Jacob, who apparently was supported by Isaac Uziel, the strict, conservative rabbi of Neve Shalom. Farar countered by reasserting his views and rejecting the rabbis' right in this matter. He may also have questioned their authority to issue a ban on an individual, claiming that this was the prerogative of the governing board (the *parnassim*) of the congregation, of which he was a member. What is certain is that, as a result of the dispute, Beth Jacob divided into two camps: one group backed the *parnas* Farar, the other group stood behind Rabbi Pardo. The Pardo camp decided to secede from Beth Jacob and form a new congregation, called Ets Chaim ("Tree of Life") and, later, Beth Israel. Their first act was to blockade and seize control of the house Beth Jacob had been using as a synagogue and thus initiate a fight over the congregation's property. Meanwhile, with Pardo's departure, Saul Levi Mortera took over as chief rabbi of Beth Jacob. He was joined in the pro-Farar faction by, among others, Abraham de Spinoza, recently arrived from Nantes.

The Beth Jacob affair was finally settled in 1619 after a Dutch court appointed arbiters.[36] The Farar group, which continued using the name 'Beth Jacob', was awarded title to the synagogue. But both groups also requested a ruling from the leaders of the Venetian community and sent representatives to Venice to press their claims. Venice refused to blame either Pardo or Farar and tried to resolve both the issues surrounding Farar's alleged heterodoxy and the practical and administrative questions over property in a spirit of reconciliation and compromise.[37] In addition to demonstrating how the lay governors and the rabbis were sometimes at odds over questions of power within the early community, this episode – and it was not the only time that an appeal was made to Venice – reveals the role that the Sephardim of the Italian republic played as a source of legal and religious authority for the Amsterdam Jews.

Each of the three congregations that existed after 1619 had its own governing board and its own set of rabbis. There were five officials on each governing board: three *parnassim* and two assessors, all eventually called *parnassim*. (When the three congregations later merged into one, the boards consolidated into a single *ma'amad,* composed of six *parnassim* and a *gabbai,* or treasurer.) The chief rabbi for Beth Jacob after 1618 was Mortera. He was seconded by Moses Halevi (until 1622, when Halevi returned to Emden). Among the *chachamim* for the Neve Shalom congregation in the period after Isaac Uziel's death in 1622 were Menasseh ben Israel and Samuel Cohen. David Pardo took over as head rabbi of Beth Israel in 1619 after his father's death; he was joined from 1626 until 1629 by Joseph Delmedigo, from Crete. Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, soon to be a prominent figure in the community, was also named *chacham* of that congregation in 1626, at the young age of twenty-one.

Despite their administrative independence from one another, Beth Jacob, Neve Shalom, and Beth Israel managed to cooperate a good deal, particularly on projects that were of special importance to the Portuguese Jewish community as a whole. In the beginning, Beth Jacob and Neve Shalom each had its own Talmud Torah association for education. But by 1616 they banded them together into a single educational brotherhood. There was a joint *Bikur Cholim* association to look after the sick and help transport the dead for burial; the *Honen Dolim,* established in 1625, for loans; and (modeled on a similar association in Venice) a charitable society for supplying dowries to orphan girls and poor brides, the Santa Companhia de dotar orfans e donzelas pobres ("Dotar," for short), founded in 1615.[38] Dotar was not just for residents of Amsterdam, or even of the Netherlands. Any poor girls who were "members of the Portuguese or Spanish nation, Hebrew Girls," whether they lived in France, Flanders, England, or Germany, were eligible to apply for assistance. The only condition was that they marry a circumcised Jew under a bridal canopy (*chuppah*) in a Jewish ceremony.

By 1622, a joint board of representatives, the Senhores Deputados, was set up to oversee issues of concern to the community at large. The board consisted of two *parnassim* from each congregation, although on questions of particular importance all fifteen *parnassim* – the Senhores Quinze – would meet. The *deputados* were authorized to regulate, among other things, internal taxation (especially the *imposta,* a tax levied upon import and export transactions and an extremely important source of funds for the community treasury); the appointment of *shochetim* and the provision of kosher meat; burial, through the Beth Chaim society; and immigration.

Immigration was an issue of great importance to the community in the 1620s. In 1609, the Sephardic Jewish population of Amsterdam was about two hundred individuals (out of a total municipal population of 70,000); by 1630 it was up to one thousand (as the city's population climbed to 115,000). And it was an increasingly heterogeneous population. The majority still consisted of those of Portuguese or Spanish descent, Jews of Iberian marrano heritage. Their everyday language in the street and in the home was Portuguese, with some Hebrew, Spanish, and even Dutch words thrown in. (Spanish was considered the language of high literature and Hebrew was reserved for the liturgy. Because almost all the adult members of the community up to around 1630 had been born and raised in Christian environments and educated in Christian schools, very few actually knew much Hebrew.) But a visitor to the neighborhood would also be likely to hear French, Italian, and perhaps even a little Ladino as well, as Jews from France, Italy, North Africa, and the Near East, many also of converso heritage, arrived in Amsterdam, attracted by its renowned freedom and wealth. To the great consternation of the Portuguese, not all of these Sephardim had achieved the level of cultivation and prosperity of the original merchant families. One way of regulating the community's population (and, indirectly, its character) was by encouraging many of these new, often indigent, immigrants to settle elsewhere. The *imposta,* in fact, was instituted in part to help raise money to send the Jewish poor to places where the cost of living was lower than in Amsterdam.[39]

It was even more difficult to assimilate the Ashkenazic Jews who started arriving from Germany and Poland in the second decade of the seventeenth century.[40] Most of these Yiddish-speaking easterners initially came from ghettos and in small numbers. But as the Thirty Years' War made life more difficult for Jews in the German lands, and as pogroms became harsher and more frequent, the Ashkenazic population of Amsterdam grew significantly. By the end of the century, the German, Polish, and Lithuanian Jews would outnumber the Sephardim by almost two to one.

The differences between Amsterdam's Sephardim and Ashkenazim in these first decades were striking. Whereas the Portuguese were relatively well-off and highly organized, the *tudescos* were, for the most part, poor and lacking any communal organization of their own. With very few exceptions (Rabbi Mortera being one), educated Ashkenazim tended not to emigrate to Amsterdam. The settlers were mostly tradespeople, such as peddlars and butchers. They quickly became dependent upon the Portuguese community, both economically and spiritually. The Sephardim gave them employment (as slaughterers, meat sellers, printers, even as domestic servants), let them pray in the congregations' synagogues, and (until 1642) allowed them to bury their dead at Ouderkerk. Slowly, the Ashkenazim managed to organize themselves socially and religiously independently of the Portuguese community, and in 1635 they established their first congregation.

Even if they were not particularly learned, the Ashkenazim who settled in Amsterdam had not been cut off as a group from normative Judaism and forced to assimilate into local gentile society, as the marranos from Portugal and Spain had been. Rather, for centuries they and their ancestors had been living the traditional life of the Jew, isolated from the surrounding culture. They knew the language of the Torah and the demands of *halacha*. For this reason, some Ashkenazim were able to achieve prominence as teachers in the Portuguese community. On the whole, however, the Sephardim were rather contemptuous of the German and Polish Jews in their midst. They resented their shabby clothes and their archaic and "uncultivated" habits and practices. The Ashkenazim of seventeenth-century Amsterdam were never able to acquire the prestige or status of the Portuguese. The differences between the two groups were immediately apparent to anyone walking down the main thoroughfares of the Jewish quarter. Etchings of the period (some by well-known Dutch artists) show that the dress of the Sephardim was stylish, well-tailored, and in many respects indistinguishable from that of the Dutch. From their hairstyles, hats, and capes to their stockings and boots, the Portuguese affected the manners of the Amsterdam mercantile class, with whom they had regular business and social contacts. The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, clearly fect (from 1609 to 1621), the colonial products were carried to Lisbon, Oporto, Madeira, and the Azores, and then on to Amsterdam and other northern cities. With the resumption of the war, which kept Dutch ships out of Spanish and Portuguese ports, the goods often went directly from Brazil to Amsterdam.

The Amsterdam Jews worked with Portuguese partners – usually New Christian merchants – and tended to invest their money in their own companies and ships rather than in the powerful Dutch companies. When the Portuguese settling in Amsterdam returned to Judaism, they often took Jewish names for use within the community while retaining their Portuguese New Christian names for business and other purposes (much as Jews today have Hebrew Jewish names in addition to their ordinary family or given names). The man most Dutch merchants knew as Jeronimo Nunes da Costa was called Moseh Curiel by his fellow Jews; Bento Osorio was called David Osorio, and Francisco Nunes Homem was David Abendana. In their dealings with their Portuguese (and, on occasion, Spanish) partners, however, the Sephardim often used Dutch aliases to conceal their Iberian origins from the eyes of curious Inquisitors and their spies. Thus, Abraham Perera became "Gerardo van Naarden," David Henriques Faro became "Reyer Barentsz Lely," and (more literally) Josef de los Rios became "Michel van der Rivieren" and Luis de Mercado became "Louis van der Markt."[48] Their real names would have given them away as Portuguese residents of Amsterdam (and, thus, as probably Jewish), hence endangering their Portuguese partners or even their own relatives still living in Iberia. Any kind of Jewish connection rendered one suspect in the eyes of the Inquisition, which continued to keep a close watch on its converso population. (On occasion, the Inquisition still managed to touch, and even deeply wound, those who had escaped beyond its immediate grasp. The Amsterdam community was horrified when it received word of the public burning of Isaak de Castra-Tartos, one of its own, in 1647. He had left Amsterdam as a young man, traveling to Spain and Portugal to try to convert marranos back to Judaism. It was a foolhardy project. He was caught, of course, and readily confessed to his "crimes." It was reported that, as he stood on top of the pyre, he screamed out the *shema:* "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." A funeral service was conducted for him in Amsterdam by Rabbi Mortera.)

When the truce ended in 1621, the Dutch Jews' economic fortunes suffered greatly, as direct trade between Holland and Spain or Portugal was officially prohibited by the Spanish Crown. Under these circumstances, many Jews chose to emigrate to neutral territory (such as Hamburg or Gluckstadt) to continue business as usual. But Dutch Sephardic–Iberian trade, now contraband, continued nonetheless. Through the use of neutral vessels, loopholes in the embargo on Dutch shipping, and, especially, secret contacts in Portugal and Spain via relatives or the converso network, the Jews who remained in Amsterdam managed to carry on, although at a substantially lesser volume. They were even able at this time to expand their trade with Morocco (munitions and silver) and Spain (fruit, wine, silver, and wool), as well as with Italian cities such as Leghorn and Venice (silk and glass).

The overseas trade controlled by the Sephardim did wonders for the Dutch domestic economy by stimulating industries from shipbuilding and related activities to the refining of sugar. The Jews themselves were rather restricted in their local business options. They were excluded from shopkeeping and the retail trades, as well as from most of the traditional crafts governed by guilds (with the exception of physicians, apothecaries, and booksellers). Although Jewish merchants could purchase citizenship, they were not therefore entitled to all burgher rights (and their citizenship was neither hereditary nor even transferable to their children). An Amsterdam ordinance of 1632 expressly stipulates that "Jews be granted citizenship for the sake of trade . . . but not a license to become shopkeepers." And yet they were still able to profit at home from the new opportunities opened up as a result of colonial trade, as these tended to be in areas not covered by the established guilds or run by well-entrenched interests: diamond cutting and polishing, tobacco spinning, and silk weaving, to name but a few. The Dutch Jews even managed to become involved in the refining of sugar, although this was a trade from which they were officially excluded until 1655.[49]

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Jewish life in seventeenth-century Amsterdam was, for the most part, concentrated in a fairly well-defined neighborhood. There were never any legal restrictions on where Jews could live in Amsterdam; but because of the lack of space in the old parts of the city, as well as the need for Jews to live in close proximity to one another (and to their synagogue) in order to develop a properly orthodox community, the Jews arriving in the first few decades of the seventeenth century tended to settle together within the new section that resulted from the city's 1593 extension project. There was, first of all, the Vloonburg (or Vlooienburg) quarter, a square island of recently drained land surrounded by canals and the Amstel River and accessible by way of four bridges. (The once-inundated quarter got its name from the Dutch word for flood, *vloed*). Vlooienburg was cut into four main plats by two central streets that crossed in the middle of the island, with two additional plats on the Amstel side. Here, in the district now known as the "Waterlooplein," was the Nieuwe Houtmarkt, the Houtgracht, the Leprozenburgerwal, Lange Houtstraat, Korte Houtstraat, and Binnen Amstel. Before the influx of the Jews, much of this area was given over to the processing and marketing of wood (*hout* in Dutch), which was of great importance for the building of Holland's celebrated mercantile and military fleets. It was, then, in addition to the Jews, a neighborhood of wood dealers and warehouses. The houses in the interior of the island were made mostly of wood, not brick like the wealthier homes along the city's main canals. By the 1630s, the poorer Ashkenazim were settling in these narrow inner streets and alleyways. The better-off among the Sephardim lived on the broad and open boulevards along the outside border (especially on both sides of the Houtgracht).

The other main thoroughfare of the Jewish quarter was the Breestraat (later called the "Jodenbreestraat," or Jews' Broad Street), which ran parallel to the street that was the horizontal axis of the Vlooienburg island. The Breestraat and Vlooienburg were connected by a short city block and a canal bridge. The community built its magnificent new synagogue at the western end of the Breedestraat in 1679; it still stands there today. In 1650, 37 of the 183 houses on the Vlooienburg island (or about 20 percent) were wholly or partly owned by Portuguese Jews. The Portuguese also comprised about 24 percent of the property owners of the Jewish quarter as a whole, although they constituted a much greater percentage of the residents of the district, since many Dutch-owned houses there were rented to Jews. Eighty percent of the Sephardim who registered in the city's marriage records between 1598 and 1635 lived in the Vlooienburg/Breestraat neighborhood.[50]

The Jewish quarter was certainly no ghetto. Many non-Jews also lived and worked in these streets (including, for a time, Rembrandt, as well as a number of other well-known painters and art dealers: Hendrick Uylenburgh, Paulus Potter, Pieter Codde, and Adriaen van Nieulant). The wealthiest Jews, on the other hand, tended to move out of this district and onto

Amsterdam's more upscale canals. Manuel Baron de Belmonte, for example, lived on the Herengracht, and the De Pinto family lived in a mansion on the St. Anthoniesbreestraat. The Sephardic community was not an isolated one, and the Portuguese Jews were in close business, intellectual, and social contact with their Dutch neighbors. There were Christian maids in Jewish households (a situation that naturally gave rise to rumors of sexual scandals, some of them true) and joint business ventures between Jews and the Dutch. Jews were also known to frequent Amsterdam's cafés and taverns, where they presumably drank nonkosher wine and beer.[51]

Contemporary engravings from Spinoza's time show the main thoroughfares of the Jewish quarter to be neat, prosperous-looking, tree-lined streets, with all of the commercial and social activity one would expect in a seventeenth-century Dutch urban quarter. Most of the brick houses are standard fare for Amsterdam, typically tall and narrow, although there are a few rather broad, mansion-like structures – dwellings, no doubt, of more prosperous families. Not all the buildings were residential; there were still timber yards, warehouses, mercantile offices, and other businesses. During the day, the streets were filled with people conducting their affairs, strolling, or shopping – visiting, for example, the *groenmarkt,* or vegetable market, on the Houtgracht – while boats and barges of various sizes were moored along the canal right alongside the street. The trip to the cemetery at Ouderkerk was a straight and fairly short barge trip up the Amstel. To all appearances, the Portuguese Jewish quarter into which Spinoza was born was practically indistinguishable from any other part of the city. The sounds – the words being spoken or sung – and perhaps even the smells emanating from the kitchens were Iberian, the complexions of its inhabitants were darker and more Mediterranean-looking, but the sights were distinctly Dutch. The Sephardim had, in less than three decades, managed to recreate on the banks of the Amstel what they had been forced to leave behind in Spain and Portugal one hundred and forty years earlier: a rich and cosmopolitan but distinctly Jewish culture. It is altogether fitting that Amsterdam should have become celebrated as the "Dutch Jerusalem."

2

Abraham and Michael

On a typical day in the 1610s, both sides of the Houtgracht, the canal separating the square island in Vlooienburg from the neighborhood surrounding the Breestraat, would be teeming with activity. Besides the wood trade operating out of warehouses in the district, which sent barges loaded with lumber up the canal and out to the Amstel, as well as the art dealers marketing their paintings, there was the hustle and bustle of the Jews going about their ordinary daily affairs. All three of the community's synagogues fronted the canal. A member of the Portuguese *gemeente,* whether he lived in the interior of the island or in the more upscale Breestraat quarter, would find himself on the Houtgracht several times in a day. He might be on his way to or from synagogue, attending to congregational or communal business, striking a deal with another merchant, or taking his children to the community's school.

Among the Sephardim who could be found working or worshiping along the canal was one Abraham Jesurum de Spinoza, alias Emanuel Rodriguez de Spinoza. He often went by the name Abraham de Spinoza de Nantes, to distinguish himself from another member of the community, Abraham Israel de Spinosa de Villa Lobos (alias Gabriel Gomes Spinosa). The name "de Spinoza" (or "Despinosa," or "d'Espinoza," among other variants) derives from the Portuguese *espinhosa* and means "from a thorny place." The family may originally have been Spanish, escaping, like so many others, to Portugal in the fifteenth century. Abraham was, for all we know, born in Portugal. But the first extant record concerning him places him in Nantes in 1596. He fled to France probably sometime in the early 1590s, most likely along with his sister Sara. There seems also to have been a brother, Isaac, and his family. Perhaps some relative or friend had been denounced as a Judaizer to the local church tribunal. The voracious Inquisition was rarely satisfied with single individuals, and they had ways of loosening tongues and getting more names. Often, as soon as a converso clan suspected that the Amsterdam Sephardic community. On December 3, 1620, Abraham and his maidservant were released from custody by the municipal authorities. The notice read as follows:

> Emanuel Rodrigues Spinosa, Portuguese, was released from custody by the judicial board with the solemn promise that whenever the Lord Sheriff summons him on the orders of the judicial board, he will again appear in court, this on the condition that he provides security. Dr. Francisco Lopez Rosa and Francisco Lopez Dias stand surety and promise herewith that they will produce the said Emanuel Rodrigues in court or else to comply with the verdict of the judicial board. Promised thus etc. Done on the 3rd of December, in the presence of the honorable Frederick de Vrij, presiding mayor as sheriff, Jan Petersz. de With and Joris Jorisz., member of the judicial board. Toboda Ockema of Nantes, maid-servant of the said Emanuel Rodrigues, was released as above in all respects.[4]

We do not know why Abraham and his maid were arrested in the first place. Toboda may have originally come with the family to Amsterdam from Nantes or even Portugal, or perhaps Abraham (availing himself once again of the converso network) brought her to Holland later. Were they having an affair? Vaz Dias thinks so, noting that this was something that Amsterdam's Portuguese Jews (including the rabbis) were frequently accused of doing. He suggests that "one must remember . . . that among the Israelites who had come from the south there was a different set of moral values than among the strict Calvinists."[5] Polygamous (and adulterous) relationships between masters and servants were not uncommon in Iberia, and the Jews, long assimilated to Spanish and Portuguese customs, may have added this practice to their other departures from the precepts of the Torah.

In 1619, Abraham was on the other side of the bail bond. In August of that year, Rabbi Saul Levi Mortera, newly appointed as the chief rabbi for the Beth Jacob congregation, was in judicial detention, for reasons that remain unknown. Abraham and Jacob Belmonte, one of the wealthier members of the community, stood surety for Mortera. It could be that Abraham was simply acting on behalf of his congregation, which was trying to get its rabbi out of jail. But Abraham was not yet, at this time, one of the governors of Beth Jacob. A more plausible suggestion is that Abraham and Rabbi Mortera were on rather good terms, perhaps even close friends. In 1625, Mortera acted as a witness to a notarial deed in which Abraham, "ill in bed but in full control of his mind and speech," conferred the power of attorney on Michael d'Espinoza, his nephew and son-in-law, to represent him with the Amsterdam Exchange Bank, "to write off from and add to his account there, to bring cash into the bank and to withdraw it and to do all that is required and to grant a power of attorney if necessary."[6] This shows not only the faith that Abraham had in Michael, but also the close relationship he had with Mortera, who took the time to come to the sick man's house in order to witness this ordinary business transaction. Perhaps their friendship had its roots in the dispute that split apart the Beth Jacob congregation in 1618. Both Abraham and Mortera stayed in Beth Jacob with the more liberal Farar group, rather than following Rabbi Pardo and his supporters, who went on to establish the Ets Chaim/Beth Israel congregation.[7] Little could Abraham suspect that his friend would be the chief rabbi of the united Talmud Torah congregation when his grandnephew was excommunicated.

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The notary deed in which Abraham conferred power of attorney upon Michael d'Espinoza also indicates that Michael was in Amsterdam no later than 1625. In fact, there is reason to believe that Abraham's nephew and future son-in-law was in Amsterdam as early as 1623. There is a child buried at the Portuguese Jewish cemetery in Ouderkerk who died on December 3 of that year and is identified in the Beth Chaim record books as "a child of Micael Espinosa."[8]

Michael was born in Vidigere, Portugal, in either 1587 or 1588. It is all but certain that the Isaac Espinoza who went from Nantes to Rotterdam was his father. Michael's father was Abraham's brother, and the flight from Portugal to Nantes and then to the Netherlands in the same period by two Jewish men named d'Espinoza, Abraham and Isaac, must be more than mere coincidence. Although Isaac died in Rotterdam (on April 9, 1627), he was buried in the Ouderkerk cemetery, probably because he had immediate family (say, a brother and a son) in one of the Amsterdam congregations. Moreover, Michael named his eldest son – who would die young, in 1649 – Isaac, and it is common Jewish practice to name the firstborn male after the paternal grandfather. There can be little doubt, then, that the Isaac Espinoza living in Rotterdam was both brother to Abraham and father to Michael; that would also make him the philosopher's grandfather.[9]

If Isaac and Abraham left Portugal at around the same time, as seems likely – and it would have been sometime between 1588, when Michael was born, and 1596, when Abraham was doing business in Nantes – then

Michael would have been a young boy when his family took flight.[10] When Michael arrived in Amsterdam in 1623 or a short time before, it was probably from Nantes and possibly also via Rotterdam. Soon after settling in, Michael married Rachel, the daughter of Abraham. There is no surviving record of their marriage, although it probably took place in 1622 or early 1623, the year they lost the child. The infant is not named in the book of records of Beth Chaim, indicating that it may have died before it could be named on the eighth day. A second child, premature and stillborn, died on April 29, 1624.[11] The unfortunate Rachel, young and childless, died on February 21, 1627.

What brought Michael to Amsterdam in the first place? Perhaps it was Abraham's doing, as he sought to arrange a marriage between his daughter and his brother's son. Or it could be that Michael was hoping to get ahead in business. The economic opportunities in Amsterdam, particularly for a Jew (or a marrano seeking to return to Judaism), were far superior to those in either Nantes or Rotterdam. Maybe Uncle Abraham, in addition to providing Michael with a wife, was offering to set him up in business. The two men did have a close personal and financial relationship; for this we have the testimony of the document in which Abraham grants Michael power of attorney over his accounts in the Amsterdam Exchange Bank. And although there is no evidence to suggest that Abraham took Michael in as a partner in his own business, the two did engage in a "partnership in trade" involving goods from the Barbary Coast.

This joint trading venture later became a source of contention between Michael and Abraham's son, Jacob, soon after Abraham died in 1637. Relations between the two cousins were initially cordial, to all appearances. According to the notary records arising out of the dispute, Jacob Espinosa had been living in "Grancairo in Palestine" (probably Cairo, Egypt), where there was an active Jewish community. He probably returned to Amsterdam in 1637 when his father died, although the notary deeds (which identify him as "living" in Cairo and only "sojourning" or "presently" in Amsterdam) indicate that his residence in Holland was temporary. In December of that year, Michael petitioned to allow Jacob to take his father's place as a member of Dotar. Michael himself had joined the society only six months earlier, paying the required twenty guilders and "binding himself to fulfill all duties of this holy society." Dotar's board unanimously agreed to accept Jacob "as the only legal son in the place of his father."[12]

There must have been a disagreement, however, between Michael and

Jacob concerning the profits and goods related to Michael's and Abraham's business relationship. It seems that Jacob, as Abraham's heir, felt that he was owed some money from the Barbary venture. Things appear to have been resolved to Jacob's satisfaction, as on January 14, 1639, in the presence of the notary Jan Volkaertsz. Oli, Jacob discharged Michael of his obligations:

> The said deponent [S^{r} Jacob Espinosa] declared to have received for himself and his heirs, from Michael despinosa, Portuguese merchant here in this city, the sum of 220 carolus guilders, six stuivers and eight pennies as the remainder and final settlement of accounts. These concern the money that was partially recovered for his, the deponent's, deceased father from the partnership in trade that the latter had with the said Michael Despinosa to Salle in Barbary, as well as the goods from this partnership that were delivered by the said Michael Despinosa to him, the deponent, in his afore-mentioned capacity. Therefore he, the deponent, acknowledges to have been paid to his full satisfaction from the last penny to the first by the above-mentioned party for what issued from the said trading-partnership to Salle. . . . Therefore he . . . thanks the said Michael Despinosa for his good payment as above and for his settlement of the accounts and receipts which Michael Despinosa finally rendered to him in the presence of Joseph Cohen and Joseph Bueno.

Jacob goes on to declare that

> He fully receipts Michael Despinosa and his heirs and descendants for everything regarding the above matter and promises that neither he, personally, nor others through him, will make any claims, demands on the said Michael Despinosa or his heirs, either now, or later, directly or indirectly, by means of law or otherwise in any way.

But not all was well between the two cousins. Twelve days later the two were back in the presence of the same notary. A new deed mentions the matter of Jacob's inheritance. Perhaps Michael, Abraham's closest male relative in Amsterdam before Jacob's arrival, was the executor of his uncle's/father-in-law's estate; or maybe this is a continuation of the first dispute over money and goods related to the Barbary business; or it could be a new dispute over other business-related profits or debts. Since "a matter and controversy had arisen between them because of a certain inheritance claimed by the said Jacob Espinosa . . . from the said Michael Despinosa," the two agreed to submit their "differences concerning the mentioned inheritance as well as all other matters, differences and claims with everything that belongs to this matter" to arbitration, "in order to prevent a lawsuit, trouble and costs." They asked Doctor Jacob Bueno, Matthatias Aboaf, and Joseph Cohen, all prominent citizens of the Portuguese community, to render judgment on the dispute. They also agreed that if either party failed to honor the verdict of the arbiters, he had to pay four hundred guilders "for the benefit of the poor . . . one half of which will be used for the poor of this city and the other half for the poor of the Jewish nation."[13]

For two months the arbiters listened carefully to the arguments of both parties, examined all the relevant documents, and considered any additional information that might help them render a fair verdict. On March 21, the arbiters felt they could state that they had "effected an amicable agreement and compromise between the parties." On the one hand, Michael had to pay Jacob six hundred and forty guilders, which Jacob received "to his full satisfaction and contentment and for which he thanks the said Michael d'Espinosa for his good payment." For his part, Michael and his heirs had the right, "forever and hereditarily," to any future "remainders, debts, shares and credit, none excepted, as could be collected from whatever place or whatever person or persons, either issuing from the joint trading venture he had with the father of the said Jacob d'Espinosa or from other matters in whatever way of the said Jacob d'Espinosa or from other matters in whatever way or from whatever matter there might be." Whatever other money or goods might henceforth come in as a result of the business partnership Michael had with Abraham would belong exclusively to Michael, "as his free and unencumbered own property, without him having to pay anything to the said Jacob Espinosa or his relatives." The arbiters and the notary were careful to make it clear that this should be the end of the matter, and to insure that there would be no further claims from either side.[14] Michael must have known that there were some further profits to be drawn out of the business; it is hard to believe that he would otherwise have agreed to such a compromise.

Abraham, as the older and more established partner, seems to have given his son-in-law a good start in business. Michael would eventually become a moderately prosperous merchant in his own right, importing dried and citrus fruits (from Spain and Portugal), oil (from Algeria), pipes, and other goods. We do not know exactly when Michael established his own firm, but it could have been as early as the mid-1620s. These were tough years for Amsterdam's Portuguese-Jewish merchants, however, and he would have had a hard time getting a business under way.

community. In the years before 1639, when there were still three congregations, each with its own governing board of five men, becoming a *parnas* (or member of the board) may have been more of a communal obligation to be shared among the congregation's members than the true honor it would later become after the union into one large congregation. As one recent historian has noted, the *kahal kodesh*, or "holy community," had not yet fully developed into the aristocratic structure that would characterize it after 1639;[21] and many of the community's posts were filled by members who were certainly not among its wealthiest or most distinguished citizens. About seventy businessmen served as members of the Senhores Quinze during this period, and it may have been a matter simply of "taking your turn."[22] Even so, serving on the board would have been a position of some power, and becoming one of the *parnassim* an indication that one had achieved a relatively high degree of respect in the community. Being one of the *Senhores Quinze*, a representative among the Senhores Deputados, or even one of the governors of the educational board was still an honor, if only because it was a reflection of the confidence being placed in the person. The members of Beth Jacob, as well as the other congregations, entrusted their *parnassim* not just with running the synagogue and its various agencies, but also (as members of the Senhores Quinze) with the overall governing of the community, including whatever dealings with the municipal authorities were necessary. The *parnassim* were the official representatives of the Jewish community before the Dutch public, and it is hard to believe that just anyone was entrusted with this task. Finally, any honor attached to these leadership posts would also derive from the fact that it would have been considered a *mitzvah*, or deed that fulfills some obligation incumbent upon a Jew, to serve the community in this way. In other words, not everyone got to "take a turn."

In the years before the union in 1639, Michael was quite active in the community's leadership and organizations, more so than he would be in the 1640s. Like all the successful merchants of the community, including his uncle Abraham, he did his philanthropic duty and joined Dotar in 1637, contributing his membership dues (still twenty guilders) to help the poor Sephardic girls of northern Europe. He first served as a member of the Senhores Quinze, and thus as one of the five *parnassim* of Beth Jacob, in 1633, the year after Baruch's birth. At the same time, he began a two-year stint, along with Josef Cohen, as one of Beth Jacob's representatives on the board of deputies. In 1635–6 (5395), he was one of six *parnassim* on the governing board of the educational foundation, "Talmud Torah," charged with running the schools and distributing fellowships. And in 1637–8 (5398), he returned again to Beth Jacob's governing board – along with Abraham da Costa, brother of the famous heretic Uriel da Costa – and, thus, to the Senhores Quinze.[23]

During these years, much of the *parnassim*'s time was taken up, as usual, with issues of ongoing concern both to their individual congregations and to the community at large. They were worried about the inconvenience and "scandalous effects" being caused by the German Jews, who were constantly in doorways begging for alms; about the publication of books in Hebrew and Latin by members of the community without permission from the *deputados;* and about the upkeep of the burial grounds in Ouderkerk. They drafted one ordinance forbidding people to bring weapons into the synagogues, and another forbidding members to elevate their seats in the synagogue, an act that would be taken as an insult by others (it was probably intended as such). In 1631, at the behest of the municipal authorities, the *deputados* ordered all members of the community to refrain from trying to convert Christians to Judaism; violators of this rule would be punished by a ban. In 1632, the Senhores Quinze resolved to designate three members to speak with the States-General, which was at that time engaged in peace negotiations with Spain, regarding those points of the negotiations that would affect Jews and their possessions. On the same day, they issued some regulations related to what they took to be the extravagance of the recent celebrations of Simchat Torah, the holiday celebrating the end of the annual Torah reading cycle. They were clearly concerned about how such public displays were perceived by the Dutch. In 1635, after the Ashkenazim had become organized enough to establish their own congregation and synagogue, the deputies warned the members of the "Portuguese nation" that they must not buy meat that had been butchered by anyone except the three men who had been examined and commissioned to act as *shochetim* by the Sephardic community, namely Aaron Halevi (Moses' son, himself an Ashkenazic Jew), Isaac Cohen Lobatto, and Isaac de Leao.

In 1633, Michael's first year as a Beth Jacob *parnas,* the Senhores Quinze to which he belonged met on the eighth of Elul at the house of Abraham Farar. They agreed to increase the endowment of the *imposta,* the tax that was used to help finance the relocation of indigent Ashkenazim. At the same meeting they issued a very strong warning against using Jewish family names in letters to people in Spain. Anyone who violated this regulation would be put under a ban. During that year, the three *ma'amadot* met together again in order to take up the issue of Neve Shalom's contribution to the *imposta* funds, which that congregation was having trouble paying. The Senhores agreed that from then on Beth Jacob and Beth Israel would each pay three-eighths, while Neve Shalom would only have to pay one-quarter. As a member of the Senhores Quinze once again in 1637–8, Michael would have been involved in the initial discussions about uniting the three congregations into one.[24]

Judging from the notary records of the time, these were busy years for Michael. He seems to have been involved in numerous business ventures, both with fellow Portuguese Jews and with Dutch merchants. These included importing transactions initiated by his own firm, as well as acting as a secondary agent in transactions initiated by others. In June of 1634, he, along with the brothers Pieter and Wijnant Woltrincx, accepted from David Palache, "Portuguese merchant," the transfer of all the merchandise aboard ship *De Coningh David* (*The King David* – was it a Jewish-owned ship?), which was sailing home to Amsterdam from Salé in Barbary. Palache, as the notary deed states, made this move in order to reduce his debts, and one wonders whether Michael accepted the transfer in order to help Palache or because it was a wise business deal. In 1636, he was engaged in negotiations over a parcel of insured goods with Jacob Codde, a member of a prominent and liberal Dutch family in Amsterdam. The goods had been lost in a shipwreck, and in the notary record Michael acknowledges having received from Codde, who may have been responsible for their transport, the insurance.[25]

Michael's name also appears in several notary records in the 1630s because he was standing surety for someone, further testimony to his reputation as a trustworthy and reliable man. This also shows that business was good and that his finances were in order, for no one would accept the surety of a man who was unsuccessful or who could not meet his own expenses. On September 8, 1637, "Migael d'Espinosa" and Abraham da Fonseca, "also a Portuguese merchant," stand surety "of their own free will, with their persons and goods for Abraham de Mercado, doctor of medicine," who had just been released from prison.[26] Michael's willingness to stand surety for others, however, would soon cause him and his heirs, including Baruch, great difficulties.

On June 30, 1638, the Amsterdam notary Jan Volkaertsz. Oli, accompanied by Antonio Francisco de Crasto, "Portuguese merchant within this city," went to the home of the recently deceased Pedro Henriques, "during his life also Portuguese merchant of this same city." De Crasto was a creditor of Henriques, and he and the notary were at the house in order to serve Henriques's widow, Esther Steven, with a bill of exchange requiring payment. Henriques had accepted the bill some time before, and now payment was past due. Oli notes that "the said widow answered that she could not pay," but goes on to state that on the following day "Michael Despinosa . . . declared that he would accept and pay the above bill of exchange in honor of the letter."[27] Michael had performed the same service on behalf of the late Henriques two months earlier, on April 25. By June 8, Michael had been officially appointed, by the municipal authorities of Amsterdam, as one of the trustees of Henriques's bankrupt estate, along with Dr. Joseph Bueno. They were stepping in for Diego Cardozo Nunes, who had initially been appointed but later withdrew. Michael's action on June 30 was apparently in fulfillment of his curatorial duties. It is not clear what Michael's relationship to Henriques was, nor why he would take on such a burden, as it should have been obvious, even before Henriques's death, that his financial condition was precarious. Michael must have known that acting as one of two trustees of a bankrupt estate would be time-consuming and would involve him in complex and protracted legal proceedings. It could also potentially cost him a lot of money, since he was responsible for paying off Henriques's debts. He seems, in fact, to have had some trouble collecting money that was due to Henriques' estate – and that would help him satisfy its creditors – because on January 26, 1639, he and Dr. Bueno authorized a third party, Jan Nunes, to collect several debts owed to the estate. On January 31, Michael granted the power of attorney to Pedro de Faria, a merchant in Nantes – perhaps an old friend or business contact from his days in that city – and directed him "to arrest all goods and properties of Gaspar Lopes Henriques from Hamburg, that may be in Nantes." We do not know if this Gaspar Lopes Henriques was related to the late Pedro of Amsterdam, but he may very well have been; and this action could have represented an attempt on Michael's part to impound some of the Henriques family goods to help pay off the estate's debts.

The affairs of the Henriques estate would trouble Michael d'Espinoza for some time, and may have seriously affected his own finances by the late 1640s or early 1650s. Even as late as 1656, the new curators of the estate of Pedro Henriques were submitting claims on Michael's own estate, no doubt to pay off Henriques's creditors. Michael's estate would have been responsible for covering the debts and obligations that he had assumed in his lifetime. This whole business would be a particular burden for Michael's third child.

departure from the Jewish community, Spinoza relied on a friend's generosity in order to maintain himself; and that, according to some accounts, the Jewish community offered him a pension if he would return to the orthodox fold.[5]

Colerus's opinion, however, is probably the more accurate one, and certainly agrees with what the documents testify about Michael's activities in the 1630s: "Although it is commonly written that he [Spinoza] was poor and was of an inconsiderable family, it is, however, certain that his parents were respectable and well-to-do Portuguese Jews."[6] It is likely as well that when Baruch was born the family was living, not on one of the crowded backstreets of the less desirable interior of the Vlooienburg island (as some writers have assumed),[7] where so many of the poor Ashkenazim settled, but right on the Houtgracht itself. If they were in the same house that they occupied in 1650, for which we have the tax records establishing Michael's residence, they were renting from Willem Kiek, a Dutchman who owned some property in this part of town; Michael, as far as we know, never owned his own house.[8] The thoroughfare on which they lived was also sometimes referred to as the Burgwal. It was a stately street, and the Spinoza home – which Colerus calls *een vraay Koopmans huis* ("a nice merchant's house") – was near one of the busiest and most public intersections of the Jewish quarter. There were a vegetable market and a variety of businesses there, along with some very attractive homes.

The house that Michael rented from Kiek fronted the Houtgracht. Looking down and across the "wood canal," the family could see "The Antwerpen," the house that served as a synagogue for the Beth Jacob congregation. Next to the synagogue were two houses that the community was renting and using for classrooms. Thus, when it was time for Baruch to go to school, all he had to do was cross over the Houtgracht by the bridge that was practically in front of his home and walk down the Houtgracht on the other side of the canal. The house being used as a synagogue by the Neve Shalom congregation was one house down from the Spinoza home, whereas the Beth Israel synagogue – which would serve as the sole synagogue for the united congregation after 1639 – was only eight houses, a warehouse, and an alley away. The Spinoza family, then, lived at the heart of the Jewish quarter. Simply by walking out their door they could not help but run into others on their way to one of the synagogues or the community's school.

Behind Spinoza's house, in the same plat but on the diagonally opposite corner and facing the Breestraat, was the home of Hendrik Uylenburgh, a well-known art dealer and Rembrandt's agent. Rembrandt lived with Uylenburgh off and on for a number of years after he returned, in 1632, from Leiden to the city where he had done his apprenticeship. In 1639, after marrying Uylenburgh's niece Saskia, Rembrandt bought the house next door to Uylenburgh on the Breestraat, around the corner from Spinoza, a stone's throw from the house of Menasseh ben Israel, and across the St. Anthoniesluis from Rabbi Mortera's home.

By the time Baruch was born, Miriam was three years old and Isaac – if indeed he was Hanna's son – somewhat younger. Michael also had another daughter, Rebecca, but we do not know if she was Hanna's child or the child of Michael's third wife, Esther. When she and her nephew made claims on Baruch's estate after his death in 1677, she was identified in the petition as the sister (and not the half-sister) of "Baruch Espinosa."[9] This lends support to Colerus's claim that the eldest of Michael's daughters was Rebecca, and that she was one of Baruch's two sisters.[10] It is also telling, as Vaz Dias notes, that Esther, in her last will and testament, leaves all of her property at her death, "nothing excepted," to Michael, "her husband, so that he will possess all and enjoy all, for ever, as he does his own goods, without contradiction from anyone." There is no mention in this document of any children that Esther may have had with Michael, which suggests that Michael's third marriage was a childless one.[11] Finally, and perhaps of the greatest importance, Rebecca named her daughter Hanna,[12] presumably after her (and Baruch's) mother. On the other hand, the people among whom she spent her last days were apparently under the impression that she was Baruch's half-sister, and the daughter of Esther. Sometime between 1679 and 1685, Rebecca, by then a widow of twenty years, moved with her sons Michael (named, it would seem, after his maternal grandfather) and Benjamin to Curaçao, then a Dutch possession. There was a significant Portuguese-Jewish community in the West Indies, many of whom were refugees from the failed Brazil community, with ties to the Amsterdam congregation. Rebecca and Michael both died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1695. In the official history of Curaçao's Jews, the author writes that "our Ribca [Hebrew for Rebecca] was the Philosopher Spinoza's half-sister, the daughter of Michael Spinoza and his third wife Ester de Solis."[13]

There was also a third son, Abraham (alias Gabriel), who was probably younger than Baruch and born sometime between 1634 and 1638. A dating later in that range seems more likely, as Abraham was almost certainly named after Michael's uncle and the father of his first wife, Abraham de Spinoza de Nantes, who died in either 1637 or 1638.[14]

In the 1630s, then, the Spinoza household was rather full and probably very hectic. There were four, perhaps five children. Michael was busy with his importing activities and congregational duties. Hanna would have tried to stay on top of things, but there is reason to believe that she was never very healthy. She may have suffered, as Baruch was to do, from respiratory problems, probably tuberculosis, and lived only a few years after Baruch's birth. Perhaps by the time Gabriel was born Miriam was able to help out around the house. A notary record from September of 1638 affords a rare momentary glimpse inside their home:

> Today, the eighth of September 1638, I &c in the presence &c at the request of Sr. Simon Barkman, went to the house and the sick-beds of Sr. Miguel d'espinoza and his wife and requested acceptance of the bill of exchange I showed there, addressed to the said Miguel despinoza and copied out above, upon which the wife of the said Miguel despinoza, who was lying ill in bed on another bed in the same room, answered, because of the illness that has befallen my husband, the bill of exchange will not be accepted.[15]

On September 8, 1638, Hanna was sick in bed. Less than two months later, she was dead.

The language spoken in the Spinoza home was, of course, Portuguese. The men, at least, knew Spanish, the language of literature. And they prayed in Hebrew. All the boys in the community were required to study the "holy tongue" in school, while the older generation, raised in Catholic environments, may have had only a phonetic familiarity with the language. Most of the members of the family probably also learned how to read and speak some Dutch, as this was necessary for getting around in the markets and for communications and documents related to business, although at least one of the notaries whom the Jewish merchants often employed had an assistant who understood Portuguese. (Michael, however, seems not to have understood spoken Dutch very well. In a notary document of August 1652 it is stated that when the notary came to the Spinoza household to read to Michael a protest being lodged against him by the skipper of a ship – the seaman was complaining about how badly he had been treated by Michael's agents in Rouen and Le Havre, France – Michael's daughter had to translate for him.)[16] But if Michael d'Espinoza and his children needed to be multilingual in their mundane and sacred affairs, still, like most of the families of the community, the language they used in the street and in running their household was Portuguese. Even when he was older, Spinoza, although perfectly fluent in Latin and knowledgeable in Hebrew, was always more comfortable in Portuguese than in any other language. In 1665, writing to Willem van Blijenburgh in Dutch, Spinoza closes by saying, "I would have preferred to write in the language in which I was brought up [*de taal, waar mee ik op gebrocht ben*]; I might perhaps express my thoughts better"; he then asks Blyenburgh to correct the mistakes in the Dutch himself. It is clear that the *taal* he is referring to here is Portuguese, and not, as some scholars have assumed, Latin.[17]

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The 1630s, like the previous decade, were a difficult time for the United Provinces. It was a period of economic stagnation, even recession, as the war with Spain dragged on, draining financial and material resources and continuously generating obstacles to trade. It was also a time of political and religious conflict. There were irrational upheavals in the markets and serious outbreaks of the plague. And, through it all, Amsterdam's Jews, ever conscious of their status as a group of resident aliens, kept a nervous eye on developments both within and outside their community.

In the summer of 1632, Spain suffered a number of significant setbacks in its military pursuit to maintain a strong presence in the Netherlands. Frederik Hendrik, leading the army of the northern Netherlands, did not succeed in stimulating a revolt in the southern Low Countries against the Spanish crown, despite his promise that the Catholic clergy in any towns that came over to the side of the States General would be allowed to stay and continue serving Catholics in their churches. But the Stadholder's siege of Maastricht did bring about that city's capitulation, following the earlier surrenders of Venlo and various other small towns. The southern provinces were demoralized and not a little alarmed, and they forced Isabella – daughter of Philip II and the local governor for the reigning Spanish monarch, Philip IV – to convene the States General of the south. The representatives to that body, concerned about the future of their union as a Catholic land, voted to open peace negotiations with the north. Talks in The Hague began that fall.

Philip IV was not the only one who was unhappy about these pacific developments. The Dutch themselves were divided. Some felt that, as the republic was really no longer in any grave danger and the war was now just a matter of limiting (or even rolling back) Hapsburg power in the southern Netherlands, it was time to stop fighting. Peace, they argued, could only be a good thing. It would certainly ease the strains on the economy and reopen trade routes. Besides, France was becoming a major power in its own right and would help counterbalance the Hapsburgs. Adriaan Pauw, a strong advocate for peace and someone who was deemed acceptable to both Arminians and Counter-Remonstrants – now no longer just theological adversaries but also identified, respectively, as the tolerant liberal and the narrow conservative political camps – led the Dutch delegation to the talks. He was initially supported by Frederik Hendrik himself, as well as by the two major cities of the province of Holland, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, whose mercantile economies stood to benefit the most from peace. On the other side stood many Counter-Remonstrant towns, which were in favor of continuing the war and mobilizing for the final defeat of the Catholic forces.

As the peace conference became less productive – hindered both by the north's insistence that members of the Reformed Church be allowed to practice openly in the south and by the south's demand that the Dutch relinquish their possessions in Brazil – the division in the Dutch camp grew. Pauw and the Arminians favored the end of hostilities above all else and were willing to modify the Dutch conditions for peace. The Counter-Remonstrants argued against making any concessions to the south, particularly in the matter of religion and territory, and they insisted that the negotiations be broken off immediately. Frederik Hendrik gradually moved over to the "war camp," especially when he saw that an alliance with France against Spain, which would increase his power, was possible. By late 1633, the Stadholder (backed by the Counter-Remonstrants) and the Grand Pensionary (allied with the Arminians) were locked in a battle for control of the States of Holland and thus, given the power of the States of Holland in the United Provinces as a whole, for political domination of the republic. In essence, it was not only a fight over whether or not to pursue peace with Spain, or even over foreign policy as a whole: what was at issue was the political identity of the union of the northern provinces. Pauw and his allies basically stood for the preeminence of the States, and thus for a republican form of government. Frederik Hendrik and his Counter-Remonstrant supporters, though generally not monarchists and certainly not committed simply to jettisoning the apparatus of a republic, stood for

Sinne-en Minnebeelden, a book of pictorial emblems with moral significance, tells us that one person, probably a farmer, paid two thousand five hundred guilders for a single bulb, in the form of two bundles of wheat, four of rye, four fat oxen, eight pigs, twelve sheep, two oxheads of wine, four tons of butter, a thousand pounds of cheese, a bed, some clothing, and a silver beaker.[20] When the crash came – and come it surely would – a lot of people were going to be hurt.

It was, in the end, like the children's game of "hot potato": one did not want to be caught holding the paper when the delivery date arrived. Rather than making a profit, the final buyer would be stuck with a bunch of tulip bulbs. The High Court of Holland could not stand by any longer watching the republic's usually sober-minded citizens ruin themselves in the midst of this hysteria. When rumors that the authorities were about to intervene began circulating, prices fell precipitously as people tried quickly to unload their interests. In April 1637, the court nullified all deals made after the planting of 1636; any disputed contracts would have to be taken up with the local magistrates. A great many families and fortunes were ruined in the ensuing crash. It took the tulip growers some time to recover both their financial losses and their damaged reputations, as many blamed them for fueling the mania in the first place.[21]

We do not know to what degree the Jews were swept up by the enthusiasm. They certainly felt the indirect effects of this brief but powerful crisis in the Dutch economy, and it would be somewhat surprising if they themselves, with their commercial instincts, were not tempted to enter the fray. Because the growing of tulips was a relatively new enterprise, it was not covered by any established guild. It was therefore an area where Jews were free to try their hand, as Francisco Gomez da Costa did on a relatively large scale outside Vianen.

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The 1630s were trying years for Amsterdam's Portuguese-Jewish community as well. It was a time both of division and of union. Perhaps the most significant crisis within the *naçion* involved what was initially a theological debate between two of the community's leading rabbis from the congregations Beth Jacob and Neve Shalom. The complexity of the issues, however, made it more than a mere disagreement on a technical matter of dogma and addressed some very deep and pressing concerns for the members of the Portuguese *kehillah.* The rift, in fact, may have led to the departure of one to turn to ensure continuity. It was simply a matter of wealth and/or status. The community was, in effect, governed by a self-perpetuating economic elite, an aristocracy – or, better, oligarchy – that both selected its own successors and made all appointments to other offices and boards.[28] In this sense, it was a microcosm of Amsterdam politics. For the city, too, was no democracy. The municipal government was not composed of delegates elected by the general populace, representing the interests of the many social and economic strata of Amsterdam and occupying offices open to all. Political power in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century – and this was true of most Dutch cities and towns of the time – was vested in a relatively small and well-defined number of families, known as "regents." The regents were basically the members of some of the wealthiest families of the city that constituted its oligarchic class. The regent families came from professional as well as merchant and manufacturing backgrounds. As in the Jewish context, they were not necessarily the wealthiest families in the city. Although wealth was indeed a necessary condition for membership in the regent class, money alone was not sufficient. There were many rich families that never gained admittance to the clique. It was also a matter of social status, political and family connections, and historical contingency. The regents, according to one historian, were not a separate social or economic class but "a politically privileged section of the upper-bourgeoisie."[29] They were not nobles but financially successful families who simply had a monopoly on political power. It included both those families whose members were actually sitting on the *vroedschap,* or town council, at a given time, and those families whose members had sat on the council in the past and would no doubt do so again in the future. It was generally a closed system, although during the periods of political upheaval and reversal – the so-called *wetsverzettingen* – there occurred significant changes in the membership of the regent class. One could also marry into a regent family and thus improve the connections of one's own blood relations.

Members of regent families filled all the important and powerful offices in Amsterdam. The *schout,* or chief police official and prosecutor, was usually from a local regent family, as were the *burgemeesters.* These were the officials responsible for the day-to-day administration of the town, and were usually chosen from the *vroedschap.* Amsterdam, like most towns, had four *burgemeesters,* each holding office for only a year or two. The *vroedschap,* the real core of the regent system, was more preoccupied with gen-

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