

Amsterdam's Sephardic Merchants and the Atlantic
Sugar Trade in the Seventeenth Century

Yda Schreuder

Amsterdam's
Sephardic Merchants
and the Atlantic Sugar
Trade in the
Seventeenth Century

palgrave
macmillan

Yda Schreuder
Department of Geography
University of Delaware
Newark, DE, USA

ISBN 978-3-319-97060-8 ISBN 978-3-319-97061-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97061-5>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018952635

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2019

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover image: The Y at Amsterdam, seen from the Mosselsteiger (mussel pier), Ludolf Bakhuyzen, 1673
Cover design by Ran Shauli

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

PREFACE

The story of three generations of the Gideon family, Sephardic merchants engaged in the sugar trade in the Atlantic world in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, shows what it took to become a successful sugar merchant in the British West Indies in the mid-seventeenth century and how to establish a foothold in the Anglo-Dutch trade in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The Gideon family had its roots in Lisbon where Gideon Abudiente (1580–1660), a *Marrano* merchant, was living in the late sixteenth century. At around 1624, members of the family moved to Amsterdam and became sugar merchants. One of the sons, Moseh Gideon Abudiente (1610–1688), became a well-known scholar, poet, and mystic. Some members of the family, including Moseh, moved to Hamburg and Glückstadt in Holstein (present-day Denmark) during the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) between the Spanish Habsburg Empire and the Dutch Republic. The war caused maritime embargoes and blockades affecting commerce and merchant families were often forced to take up residence elsewhere. Several members of the Gideon Abudiente family moved to England, where the family discarded the name Abudiente and called themselves Gideon. The Gideon Abudiente family had been engaged in the Brazil sugar trade with Amsterdam and members of the family were found among the early Sephardic Jewish immigrants in Barbados where several Sephardic merchants had moved after being expelled from Brazil in 1654. Rowland Gideon, one of several sons of Moseh Gideon Abudiente, was born Rehiel Abudiente in Glückstadt but anglicized his name in London and moved to Barbados where two uncles, Abraham Gideon

Abudiente and Pakdiel Abudiente, resided as merchants and were endenized in the 1660s. In 1674, Rowland (or Roel) appears on Boston's first tax list and is engaged in a court case concerning a tobacco transaction along with Daniel Barrow (Baruch or Baruh), a member of a well-known Barbados Jewish family who was likely his trade partner. Rowland received endenization papers in July 1679 in Barbados, and in the same year he traveled to Antigua, another British colony. With his letters of denization he was entitled to travel to and conduct business in any English colony and in London. In 1684, he owned a plantation and lived in Nevis with his first wife but returned to Barbados a few years later. The name Rowland Gideon appears on a list of Barbados planters in 1692. Shortly thereafter he moved to London where, after the death of his first wife, he married the daughter of a prominent *Marrano* family named do Porto. For years thereafter he carried on his business as a West India merchant. He died in London in 1720 (or 1722) when his son Sampson Gideon took over the business.

Sampson Gideon (1699–1762) was admitted as a sworn commodity broker in London in 1729 with 25,000 English pounds in assets. Sampson Gideon became intimately engaged in the Anglo-Dutch trade of the eighteenth century. The ascent of King William III (1672–1702) to the throne of England in 1689 (the “Glorious Revolution”) had contributed significantly to Anglo-Dutch trade and finance as the Dutch (among them many Sephardic merchants) had supplied William's war chests and England was now beholden to loans supplied by Dutch and Sephardic bankers. The tangled relationships between the English and the Dutch generally was considered one reason why Anglo-Dutch trade revived during the last decade of the seventeenth century, and, in time, Sampson Gideon became one of the foremost financiers among the Anglo-Dutch Sephardic merchants and brokers. Sampson Gideon is mentioned, along with Abraham Mocatta and some other prominent Jewish precious metal brokers, as a member of the British East India Company. The Mocatta family had businesses in both Amsterdam and London and Ishac Mocatta was the last of the Sephardic merchants in Amsterdam engaged in sugar refining in the early eighteenth century. Sampson Gideon is mentioned by Charles Wilson in *Anglo-Dutch Commerce and Finance in the 18th Century* (1941) along with Joseph Salvadore, another well-known London financier, who became influential along with Amsterdam counterparts in financing British government debt in the eighteenth century. In the 1740s, Sampson raised funds for a government loan to consolidate the national debt and reduce

its interest rate. In this effort he collaborated with a wealthy Dutch merchant. Sampson married Elizabeth Erwell, a member of the Church of England, and ceased all open connection with the Portuguese synagogue at Bevis Marks in 1753.

This tale of trade and intrigue was the experience of some wealthy Sephardic merchant families engaged in the Atlantic world and illustrates the dynamics of their trade network in the westward expansion of sugar production in the course of the seventeenth century. The center of activity was Amsterdam which served as staple market and sugar refining and distribution center for the European market during most of the century. In the profit made and wealth created from the sugar trade, slavery played an important role. The story is well known and has been told many times and forms a dark page in the history of the Sephardim and Amsterdam's Golden Age. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Brazil was the largest producer of sugar drawing mostly on the technology and organization developed by the Portuguese. Most of the sugar trade was conducted via Lisbon and Amsterdam. For a brief period from 1630 until 1654, when Northeast Brazil was a Dutch colony, Dutch and Sephardic merchants controlled the supply of sugar to the Amsterdam market. In the course of the seventeenth century, sugar production and slavery spread to the Caribbean region, including the British and French colonies. Whereas in the first half of the seventeenth century Portugal and the Dutch Republic were the major imperial powers engaged in the Atlantic sugar trade, in the second half of the century England and France became the dominant players in sugar production and trade. Even so, Amsterdam remained for most of the seventeenth century the major sugar refining and distribution center.

Enduring debates have been held about the relationships between the plantation-slave economy and wealth accumulation in which European capital and technology and African slave labor were combined to generate profit from trade and distribution of sugar which contributed to Europe's economic growth and industrial development. As the European market in colonial staple goods expanded and increased, economies of scale and new technological developments contributed to greater efficiency of production and transportation and enhanced imperial competition for access to staple producing colonies. With respect to sugar production, this led to a geographical expansion throughout the Caribbean region and manifested itself in opening up new colonies for plantations and merchant trade in the course of the seventeenth century. New sugar colonies developed at a

rapid rate supplanting older colonies and being replaced in turn by new sugar frontiers. Sometimes soil depletion and overproduction were the reasons for relocating production to new colonies. In other instances, imperial competition, wars, blockades, embargoes, and protectionist policies contributed to the shifts that occurred under different imperial regimes which led to differential access to commodities, labor, and markets affecting long-distance trade and the merchant groups engaged in trade across the Atlantic. Under these circumstances, some merchant groups like the Sephardim survived and thrived, and proved to be prepared to relocate and migrate and shift alliances. Other merchants proved to be less resilient or adaptable or had no opportunity to compete under protective measures imposed by the imperial competitor. This scenario played itself out several times in the seventeenth century in the westward expansion of sugar production and trade.

The book presents a historical-geographic perspective with a focus on Amsterdam and on the Sephardic merchant network as it developed in the Atlantic sugar trade. During the Golden Age, Amsterdam was the center of sugar refining and distribution for the European market and it was clear that most Sephardic merchant communities in the Caribbean sugar trade, in both the English and French colonies, had their roots in and ties to Amsterdam. In the course of the seventeenth century, European powers alternated control over sugar colonies and engaged Sephardic merchants by encouraging them to continue in the sugar trade even when it was against the interest of the merchants of the home state. In the study we glean the intricacies of the Sephardic merchant family and kin networks across cultures and religious divides in the context of hegemonic realms. Instead of emphasizing the rise to power of one particular metropolis or the success of specific Jewish merchants in the Atlantic sugar trade, I will focus attention on the Sephardic merchant network in the context of the shifting tapestry of the Atlantic world where the rise to power of the Dutch Republic in the first half and of England during the second half of the seventeenth century form the two most prominent poles from which the story emerges.

The research for this book has been conducted over several years and the book has been long in coming. Early on I wrote a few articles for the *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* while conducting research at the archives in Barbados during short visits to the island and longer stays in the Netherlands, where I conducted research at the City Archives of Amsterdam. The idea to write a book on the subject matter

came after I retired from the Department of Geography at the University of Delaware and was offered office space at the Hagley Museum and Library. Finally, the circumstances were ripe for a concentrated effort to mull over and write a synthesis on the role the Sephardic merchants played in the Atlantic sugar trade of the seventeenth century. In the synthesis I am using existing scholarly research supplemented by new source materials derived from trade records available at the City Archives of Amsterdam and genealogical sources from Barbados and Jamaica weaving it together into the tapestry referred to. The geographical context is the expanding Atlantic world in which the Portuguese and Dutch competed alongside the British and French and entrenched themselves in their respective colonial realms. The study's main story line is the rivalry between the Dutch and the English in their respective imperial pursuits which does not diminish the role of the Portuguese or the French in their pursuits to control the sugar trade. I had to make a choice, or, rather, the choice was presented to me. I was not prepared to read original source materials in Spanish or Portuguese and it so happened that I literally stumbled upon source materials in the archives in Barbados and Amsterdam that were suitable for the kind of research I was interested in pursuing.

Doing research is for the most part a solitary enterprise. Fortunately, during the journey there are many people that make the enterprise easier and more fun. For instance, I had the pleasure and welcome help from archivists, editors, and colleagues who stood by and provided direction, critique, and support. In the early years, while conducting research in the archives in Barbados, I received generous advice from Karl Watson, then editor of the *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*. Along the way, at the Barbados Museum and Historical Society Library and Archives, in search of genealogical source materials contained in the Shillstone records of Jewish epitaphs and the burial records held at the Barbados Department of Archives, I received help from several librarians and archivists to whom I owe a great debt. My thanks especially to Harriet Pierce and Alissandra Cummins. Also, I would like to thank the journal's current editor to allow me to reuse materials and content from the articles I wrote more than a decade ago. My research at the City Archives of Amsterdam in search of freight records commenced with a consultation with Odette Vlessing, senior archivist. Her guidance and advice for researching freight records in the Notarial Archives was invaluable.

All along, and more than I could have hoped for, I had the benefit from colleagues who generously gave their time to reading and critiquing the

various drafts that I brought to their attention. In particular I would like to thank Peter Rees from the Geography Department at the University of Delaware, who read several of the drafts and offered great advice on how to change and shape the text. Roger Horowitz, the director of the Center for the History of Business, Technology, and Society at the Hagley Museum and Library provided ongoing encouragement, editorial advice, and helpful suggestions on how to navigate the landscape of the publishing world. Wim Klooster, History Department at Clark University, whom I never met but with whom I feel a personal connection as we are both alumni of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, was very generous in support of my research and a most valuable critic of my work. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge the very constructive input of an anonymous reviewer whose expectations I hope I have met. During the final stages of preparing the book manuscript for publication, editors and computer designers become a lifeline. I was very fortunate to have the help from Adam Albright, design manager at the Hagley Library, and the assistance of two excellent editors from the Palgrave Office in New York, Megan Laddusaw and her assistant Christine Pardue. The Barbados Museum and Historical Society, Yale University Press, and Henk den Heijer, designer of some of the maps in the book, allowed me reuse of materials and illustrations for which I am very grateful. Of course, in the end, a book is not an enterprise by committee but an individual pursuit for which only the author holds the responsibility.

Finally, I would like to thank the scholars in residence, colleagues, and staff at Hagley Library where I have done most of the writing since my retirement from the University of Delaware. Over the past few years I was offered the opportunity to present and discuss different topic areas related to my research at monthly “brown-bag” luncheon meetings in which the mostly young scholars in residence at Hagley participated. A book project can easily become stale if not for an academically engaged audience as I had the good fortune to enjoy. Daily contact with staff at the library, furthermore, made hour-long sessions at my desk on the computer a pleasant routine. For that I would like to thank Carol Lockman in particular, who always had a welcome word. I dedicate this book to two special people in my life: my daughter Aafke Lazar and my best friend Edmunds Bunkše.

CONTENTS

1	The Atlantic Sugar Trade: Amsterdam’s Sephardic Merchants in the Seventeenth Century	1
1.1	<i>Introduction</i>	1
1.2	<i>The Portuguese Nation: Terms and Definitions</i>	7
1.3	<i>A Historical-Geographic Perspective</i>	12
1.4	<i>Amsterdam: The Emerging Metropolitan Center of Europe</i>	15
1.5	<i>The Merchant Network System</i>	22
1.6	<i>Summary and Chapter Outline</i>	27
2	The Development of the Sephardic Jewish Sugar Trade Network	31
2.1	<i>Westward Expansion of Sugar Cultivation</i>	31
2.2	<i>New Christians and Sephardic Jews in the Sugar Trade and Cultivation</i>	38
2.3	<i>Sugar Production in Brazil Under Portuguese Rule</i>	42
2.4	<i>The Development of the Sephardic Sugar Trade Network</i>	44
2.5	<i>Amsterdam, the Portuguese Nation, and the Sugar Trade</i>	54
2.6	<i>The West India Company and Dutch Brazil (1630–1654)</i>	65
2.7	<i>Summary and Conclusion</i>	73
3	The British Caribbean World: Barbados	77
3.1	<i>The “Myth of the Dutch” and the “Sephardic Moment”</i>	77
3.2	<i>The “Myth of the Dutch” and the Loss of Brazil</i>	88
3.3	<i>The “Myth of the Dutch” and Sir William Davidson</i>	97

3.4	<i>The Dutch and the Slave Trade</i>	101
3.5	<i>The “Sephardic Moment” and the Amsterdam Sugar Market</i>	105
3.6	<i>Summary and Conclusion</i>	114
4	Amsterdam’s Dutch and Sephardic Merchants in the Atlantic Supply Trade and the Sugar Trade in the Seventeenth Century	119
4.1	<i>Evidence from Freight Records</i>	119
4.2	<i>Portuguese Jewish Merchants in Amsterdam in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century</i>	125
4.3	<i>The Amsterdam Sugar Trade in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century</i>	130
4.4	<i>Dutch Merchants in Trade with Barbados in the Mid-Seventeenth Century</i>	138
4.5	<i>Sephardic Jewish Merchants in Trade with Barbados in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century</i>	146
4.6	<i>Summary and Conclusion</i>	155
5	The Mission of Menasseh Ben Israel and Cromwell’s Western Design	159
5.1	<i>The British Trade and Navigation Act of 1651</i>	159
5.2	<i>Menasseh Ben Israel’s Mission to Cromwell and Whitehall</i>	164
5.3	<i>The London Sephardic and New Christian Community</i>	172
5.4	<i>The Emergence of the Sephardic Merchant Community of Barbados</i>	176
5.5	<i>The Sephardic Communities of Amsterdam, Brazil, and Barbados</i>	182
5.6	<i>Summary and Conclusion</i>	196
6	Sephardic Merchants and the Second Barbados: Jamaica	199
6.1	<i>The “Second Barbados”</i>	199
6.2	<i>Jamaica Under Spanish Rule and British Occupation</i>	203
6.3	<i>Clandestine and Legal Trade of Port Royal: The “Sephardic Moment”</i>	209
6.4	<i>The Emergence of Jamaica as a Sugar Colony</i>	217
6.5	<i>London and the Caribbean Reexport Trade</i>	221
6.6	<i>Summary and Conclusion</i>	228

7 The Atlantic Sugar Trade at the End of the Seventeenth Century	233
7.1 <i>Transit and Reexport Trade</i>	233
7.2 <i>Transit Trade from Curacao and St. Eustatius</i>	236
7.3 <i>The Sephardic Merchant Network and Amsterdam's Refining Industry</i>	241
7.4 <i>The Anglo-Dutch Sugar Reexport Trade</i>	245
7.5 <i>Conclusion</i>	256
Appendix 1: Notes on Evidence from Freight Records and Protocols at the Amsterdam City Archives	263
Appendix 2: Notes on Sugar Import and Export Trade	267
Bibliographic Essay	271
Index	277

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1.1 Atlantic triangular trade. (Source: D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History: Volume 1, Atlantic America, 1492–1800* (Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 1986), p. 73. Reprinted with permission of Yale University Press) 13
- Fig. 1.2 Dutch Republic and Southern Netherlands. (Source: Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817* (Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2003), Map 2.1, p. 20. Reprinted with permission of the map designer, Henk den Heijer, Professor Emeritus in Maritime History at the Leiden University Institute for History) 21
- Fig. 2.1 The Atlantic World circa 1630. (Source: D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History: Volume 1, Atlantic America, 1492–1800* (Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 1986), p. 56. Reprinted with permission of Yale University Press) 36
- Fig. 2.2 Northeast Brazil. (Source: Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817* (Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2003), Map 2.3, p. 25. Reprinted with permission of the map designer, Henk den Heijer, Professor Emeritus in Maritime History at the Leiden University Institute for History) 45

- Fig. 3.1 Caribbean region. (Source: Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817* (Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2003), Map 2.4, p. 28. Reprinted with permission of the map designer, Henk den Heijer, Professor Emeritus in Maritime History at the Leiden University Institute for History) 79
- Fig. 4.1 Dutch ships in Barbados (1633–1669). (Source: N.C. Kieft, “Windmills in the West Indies: Dutch entrepreneurs and the development of Barbados, 1621–1655” (unpublished paper deposited at the Barbados Museum and Historical Society; no year of publication). The record was derived from data reported in the Notarial Archives, Municipal Archives of Amsterdam, index cards on Barbados, 1633–1669. Reprinted with permission of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society from my article: “Evidence from the Notarial Protocols in the Amsterdam Archives about Trade Relationships between Amsterdam and Barbados in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, vol. LII, 2006, pp. 54–73; Figure 1, p. 58) 140