

Jorun Poettering

Migrating Merchants

Trade, Nation, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century
Hamburg and Portugal

Translated by
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Introduction

In what is now the borough of Hamburg called Altona, there is an old Jewish cemetery that the city has recently proposed for UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites in recognition of its outstanding cultural significance.¹ It contains a unique Portuguese-Jewish section established in 1611. With its richly ornamented grave slabs, lively figurative art, and elaborately composed elegies in several languages, the cemetery bespeaks prosperity. More particularly, it bespeaks the culture of the Portuguese Jews in Hamburg.

Many of these were merchants, well educated and widely traveled. As young men they might have spent apprenticeship years in Brazil, for example, and then moved on to Bordeaux, Livorno, or Antwerp before finally settling in Hamburg. Trade considerations influenced where they chose to settle, but their migration was not primarily motivated by economic concerns. It had far more to do with legal and social discrimination, and with the menacing presence of the Inquisition on the Iberian Peninsula. Believing Catholics for the most part, they differed very little from other Catholics in religious practice and way of life; but as *New Christians* (that is, descendants of baptized Jews) they were widely suspected of being clandestinely Jewish. And indeed, once in Lutheran Hamburg, most of the Portuguese New Christians did revert to the faith of their ancestors, and in so doing became a segregated group within the city community. Their main contact with the city's other inhabitants was by way of trade.

The Portuguese New Christians were not the only merchants who left their homelands in the seventeenth century to settle in other countries and conduct trade there. Hamburg merchants went out into the world, too, and many of them settled in Portugal. But unlike the New Christians, these people left their homes of their own accord, and were soon integrated into the host society. They learned the local language, married local women, and, if successful in business, became members of the local elite. They, too, often changed their religious identity. But again unlike the New Christians who converted to Judaism, they adopted the religious affiliation of the surrounding society: that is, Catholicism.

The history of the Portuguese Jews has been much researched, but that of the Hamburgers residing abroad is almost completely unknown. In this book I compare these two groups, and explain why the Hamburgers in Portugal behaved so differently from the Portuguese who settled in Hamburg. In particular, I examine how the two groups' different ways of integrating themselves into their new social contexts influenced their commercial activities. I will look too at the Netherlandish merchants who settled in Hamburg and Portugal, and pursued trade between both places. In their homeland they had been members of Reformed (sometimes called Calvinist, but see my note on terminology below),

Lutheran, or other Christian denominations, and in Hamburg most of them maintained these affiliations. In Portugal, however, like the Hamburgers who settled there, they adopted the Catholic faith and soon were little different from the local population.

Historians have generally ascribed behavioral differences among merchant groups to their cultures of origin. For this reason, many studies examine whole merchant diasporas whose widely distributed members were held together by common ethnic and/or religious bonds and cooperated closely in trade.² Jewish merchants, Portuguese or not, have been seen as salient examples of this phenomenon; so have Armenian, Greek, Chinese, Quaker, Scottish, and Basque merchant groups. Scholars studying merchant diasporas tend to analyze their mechanisms of networking and solidarity, and to emphasize their inner cohesion. They neglect, however, the way local conditions influenced individual settlements, and correspondingly how subgroups within a diaspora came to differ among themselves.

Specifically, historians have adduced three factors to explain the remarkable success in trade that is generally attributed to merchant diasporas: first, a “natural” loyalty and mutual support among the members, based on their common origins;³ second, the social and political isolation of these merchants within the foreign societies in which they lived;⁴ and finally, the diversity of their cultural experience, which imbued their trading practices with an innovative spirit.⁵ But existing studies seldom examine to what extent these three factors were true, how much they contributed to the merchants’ success, or even whether the foreign merchants were especially successful at all. And in fact, all of these claims are questionable. Do relatives and acquaintances never quarrel with and/or cheat one another? If they do, why should this not happen within an ethnic group or religious community? Might not the orientation of trade relations toward one’s own group lead to limited trading opportunities just as easily as to greater profitability? Is it not possible that exclusion from social and political life was a detriment to mercantile success, rather than an advantage? And does “foreignness” necessarily lead to innovation, as opposed to insecurity, conservatism, or compliance with the host society’s mores?

Economic historian Avner Greif was one of the first to research in depth how trading networks of ethnic minorities actually did enforce contract compliance and reduce commercial risk.⁶ His studies of the Maghribi traders, a group of North African Jews of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, convinced him that merchants relied on each other not for social or ethical reasons, but out of rational self-interest. Lacking the backing of strong states, they had to monitor the integrity of their trading partners themselves, which they did by circulating letters containing comprehensive information about each other’s mercantile practices. According to

Greif, it was understood that opportunistic behavior would be punished by exclusion from further business with the entire group. Thus regular communication discouraged dishonesty. But having demonstrated that commerce could indeed work under such conditions, Greif notes that a more successful approach was the one taken by the Genoese merchants of the time. They relied not on informal punishment by peers, but on a formalized, court-based and state-backed system for the enforcement of contracts. One reason this approach was more successful was that those institutions did not restrict the merchants' trade to members of their own group. Greif takes ethnic and religious homogeneity as a precondition for the reputation-based model of trade. But he gives no reason why the merchants' rational proceedings (on which he bases his exposition) would not work just as well among merchants from different groups of origin, as long as they remain in regular communication.

In this book I do not assume that there was anything intrinsically advantageous about membership in a merchant diaspora. Rather, I postulate that such membership was the result of limited integration and assimilation when foreign merchants moved into societies that were new to them. I ascribe the reasons for remaining foreign not primarily to the merchants themselves, but to external factors. I will show that the merchants adapted their behavior to the conditions they encountered. Where there were few barriers to their acceptance into the host society, they assimilated readily and gave up their status as a special group. But where they were met with resistance they banded together, defending their common interests and developing their group identity. In either case they made use of many different mechanisms to ensure contract compliance and reduce commercial risk, including private-order solutions and the state and city institutions available to them.

As I have said, the history of the Portuguese-Jewish merchants has received a lot of study. There are historical reasons for this. Over the centuries, Jewish commerce has served as a kind of benchmark for economists, both in discussions among themselves and in their communications with the public at large.⁷ They have used (partly true and partly invented) descriptions of Jewish trade to illustrate positive and negative consequences of certain behaviors, thus making Jews "responsible" for economic and social developments of all kinds, including some that filled the public with dread and anxiety. As late as the early twentieth century, renowned scholars like Werner Sombart were explaining the entire economic modernization of Europe as a function of Jewish (specifically Portuguese-Jewish) commercial activities.⁸

Since the early 1980s, however, the Portuguese Jews have evoked a different kind of interest in historical researchers. Investigation has turned to questions of identity, and to their social, cultural, and intellectual life.⁹ Only a few

historians – most prominently Jonathan Israel – have continued to examine them primarily in terms of trade.¹⁰ And Israel's writings remain largely faithful to conventional historiographic models. Like many of his predecessors, he ascribes to the Portuguese Jews a vanguard role in the economic development of Europe. He characterizes the Portuguese Jews as particularly mobile, especially well networked, and very cosmopolitan in their outlook. According to him, their trade networks were superior to those of other merchants, and their importing of goods (especially pepper, spices, and sugar) from Portugal's overseas territories opened up a new commercial sector in northern Europe that would be of crucial importance in the future. Hermann Kellenbenz advanced similar arguments several decades before Israel; his, however, were developed in the context of Nazi ideology. His research was funded in 1939 by the Research Department on the Jewish Question (Forschungsabteilung Judenfrage) of the anti-Semitic Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany (Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands), and his results were published in 1958, probably in a much revised form. His monograph, *Sephardim an der unteren Elbe* (The Sephardim on the Lower Elbe), has up to now remained the most influential monograph on the history of the Portuguese Jews in Hamburg.¹¹

Only recently have works appeared that take new approaches to Jewish economic history and come to new conclusions.¹² The most important of these is undoubtedly Francesca Trivellato's book on transcultural trade in the Portuguese-Jewish diaspora.¹³ Trivellato calls into question the importance of ethnically homogeneous trade networks to the merchants' success, and shows that trust among merchants was not bound to any particular ethnic or religious solidarity. She argues that although common origins and kinship were useful in building trade networks, they were by no means necessary. Despite cultural limitations and religious prejudices, members of different ethnic and religious groups were able to develop the trust necessary for profitable economic cooperation. That is the assumption on which this book, too, is based.

Research about the non-Jewish merchant groups is much less developed. Whereas the limited integration of the Jews meant that they persisted over centuries as a recognizable, nameable, and describable group, merchants who assimilated quickly were not viewed as particularly interesting by those in their environment, nor did they themselves leave behind much evidence suggesting a significant sense of group identity. After a few generations, the Hamburgers and Netherlanders living abroad were only barely perceptible as such. As a result, few academic studies have examined the Netherlandish merchants out in the larger world, although in the seventeenth century they must have been just as numerous as the merchants of Portuguese-Jewish origin.¹⁴ Even fewer studies have looked at merchants from Hamburg living abroad.¹⁵

Attention to the particularities of the prominent trading diasporas has tended to obscure the commonalities of their members with other merchants involved in long-distance trade. All of the merchants trading between Hamburg and Portugal were faced with the problem of establishing and maintaining sustainable trade relations between two distant places. All of them needed to surmount political, legal, and religious barriers. Almost all of them lived abroad for significant periods of time, and as a result were confronted with the experience of being foreigners. They had to learn to navigate new cities, master foreign languages, adapt to local trading customs, and find their place in unfamiliar social and religious environments. To the Hamburgers, Portuguese Catholicism was as strange as Hamburg Lutheranism was to the Portuguese. All merchants in foreign climes were forced to change their habits; only thus could the economic exchange take place that overcame cultural distance. However, the different groups altered their behavior in different ways.

As I will show, Portuguese merchants, whether living as New Christians in their homeland or as Jews abroad, had greater difficulties to contend with than other merchants. Whereas the latter were often privileged, the New Christians and Jews were discriminated against. While other merchants knew that they could count on a measure of support from the authorities back home, the New Christians and Jews could expect no such assistance. Nor could they earn access to the social or political elite of the countries where they settled, something the other merchants sometimes achieved. Portuguese merchants were also less mobile than other merchants. Because their migration often took the form of flight, they had not only to relocate their entire families, but also to come to terms with the fact that they might never return to their homeland. Their children and grandchildren, too, faced this definitive separation. Because of these highly restrictive circumstances, the Portuguese-Jewish merchants in Hamburg were in fact less successful in their commercial ventures with the Iberian Peninsula than the merchants who were free to travel there.

There is no doubt that the trade between Hamburg and Portugal that I examine in this book is only one example, and a very particular one, of the multifarious commercial activities pursued by the members of these three merchant diasporas. But it illustrates vividly the strategies that merchants developed in response to economic and political circumstances, legal frameworks, and social and religious influences. And for a number of reasons it is particularly well suited to a comparative study of these strategies, and of how they eventually came together in the distinctive ways in which the merchants constituted their commercial, ethnic, and religious groups.

First, the trade between Hamburg and Portugal was intense in the seventeenth century. Portugal was one of the most important commercial regions for

merchants in Hamburg, and given the fact that Portugal was often at war with its other trading partners, Hamburg's neutrality was of major significance to merchants active there.

Second, Hamburgers, Portuguese, and Netherlanders were all substantially engaged in trade between Hamburg and Portugal. Merchants of all three groups migrated at approximately the same time, and in significant numbers, between the two places. Portuguese and Netherlandish merchants began to come to Hamburg in the 1580s, and continued to do so until about the mid-seventeenth century. Although the migration of merchants from Hamburg and the Netherlands to Portugal began earlier and continued later, it too intensified considerably after the 1580s.

Third, Hamburg and Portugal were profoundly different in political, economic, and religious organization. Hamburg was a largely independent city-state governed by a citizen oligarchy, most of whose members came from important merchant families. Portugal was a territorial state governed by a monarch who aspired to exclusive control over large areas of global trade; merchants there had little political power. Furthermore, in Portugal merchants had to deal with the Inquisition, whose complex interests were not always aligned with those of the Crown. In Hamburg, clerics wielded comparatively little power.

The different structures in these two locales shaped their different attitudes toward foreign merchants. Comparing the native merchants in each place with two different groups of foreign merchants enables us to distinguish between phenomena that were typical of foreigners generally, and those that were group-specific. To this end, I contrast the Portuguese in Hamburg and the Hamburgers in Portugal with the Netherlanders who migrated to both places. The inclusion of the Netherlanders allows us further to distinguish between membership in a foreign ethnic group and membership in a foreign religious faction. Unlike the two other groups, the Netherlanders before they emigrated had belonged to a variety of religious denominations (predominantly Reformed, Lutheran, and Catholic). Thus some of them entered Hamburg and Portugal as members of the religious majority, and some as part of a religious minority.

This book consists of three sections. In the first I examine the framework within which trade between Hamburg and Portugal took place, and which conditioned the migrations and lives of the merchants. I consider the wide-ranging political and economic interdependencies associated with Europe's opening to the Atlantic, the Portuguese overseas expansion, the Dutch War of Independence, and the Thirty Years' War. Exploration of these factors paves the way to an examination of policies regarding trade and aliens in both places, and their respective implementations. I analyze the foreign merchants' legal status in these

places and also the creation of the foreign delegations that championed the mercantile concerns of the governments they represented. Finally, I explore the policies of the Portuguese Inquisition toward both local and foreign merchants, and its conflicts with the Crown in this regard.

In the second section I consider the merchants themselves, their lives, and their trade. After a description of the paths, causes, and consequences of their migrations, I take a closer look at the merchants' biographies. What were their social backgrounds? What kinds of education did they have? How well did they speak the languages of the countries to which they migrated? What public offices did they achieve? I then examine their assets and turnovers. Banking and customs data from Hamburg enable me to correct some persistent assumptions about the comparative success of the various ethnic groups, as well as their mercantile specializations. Finally, I describe the public infrastructures and services the merchants had at their disposal to overcome the many problems associated with long-distance commerce and their status as foreigners. These include the services of notaries and brokers, the postal system and newspapers, various means of insurance, and the use of bills of exchange for the transfer of capital.

The third section takes a closer look at social and business relationships among the merchants. I examine first how trust among merchants was generated, the significance of mercantile reputation, and the role religion played in this. I then examine the personal trade networks of the various merchant groups. How did they develop? What roles did kinship relations and ethnic or religious affiliation play? How flexible and resilient were the networks? I also consider alternative forms of mercantile organization, namely the Commercial Deputation in Hamburg and the Brazil Company in Portugal. I examine in particular the role of foreigners in these groups. Finally, I study the nation- and religion-bound communities of the foreign merchants, which not only reflected mercantile concerns, but fulfilled social, religious, and charitable functions as well.

As is usual with historical comparisons, the documentation upon which I base this study is vast but uneven. The different administrative structures in my two locales, and the variations among the three groups of merchants, mean that existing sources do not always provide comparable information. The Inquisition, in particular, left behind a rich store of biographical data for which there is no counterpart in Hamburg. On the other hand, a large amount of statistically analyzable material was preserved in Hamburg, while due to documentary losses in Portugal, hardly anything of that sort is available there. As to personal letters, I have those written by Hamburg mayor Johann Schulte to his son of the same name, a young merchant who was living in Lisbon; I have no such significant correspondences written by Netherlandish or Portuguese families with which to compare them. Similarly, the sources from the Portuguese-Jewish community in

Hamburg are far richer than the ones we possess about the communities of the Netherlanders and Hamburgers in Portugal. All in all, however, I have tried to reconstruct (insofar as possible) a balanced picture, and one that respects the complexity of the subject.

Finally, some notes about terminology. The word *nation* had a different meaning in the early modern period than it has today. Originally referring to ethnic (or cultural) groups – that is, to groups of people with similar customs who felt connected by actual or supposed shared origin – in the Middle Ages it was applied in particular to merchant communities that enjoyed special legal status in a city. Both of these meanings implied common origins, but in the latter case, membership in a nation was essentially defined by statute. Eventually the word also came to mean something closer to our modern understanding – that is, the inhabitants of a nation state – and was sometimes used in this way by the ruling authorities. Precise differences in meaning are spelled out in more detail over the course of the book.

While the term *Portuguese* designates all people from Portugal and of Portuguese descent, in this book it is relevant mostly, but not exclusively, to New Christians and Jews. I use *Portuguese Jews* to refer exclusively to Portuguese of Jewish faith; in general, either they or their ancestors had once been New Christians. I do not use the term *Sephardim* (which is employed in other studies), because the Portuguese Jews living in Hamburg and other towns of the Atlantic diaspora neither called themselves Sephardim nor were they called such by their host societies.¹⁶ Also, it is important to keep in mind that while Portugal had been an independent kingdom since the High Middle Ages, during the *Iberian Union* (that is, from 1580 to 1640) it was governed by the Spanish king in personal union with Spain; while the meaning of the terms Portugal and Portuguese did not vary, the political context sometimes did.

In conformity with the historical sources I use the term *Netherlanders* to mean people who originated from any of the Seventeen Provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands, according to their mid-sixteenth-century boundaries: that is, the triangle delineated by Groningen in the north, Luxembourg in the south, and Artois in the west. By *Dutch* I mean only the Netherlanders of the seven northern provinces, the so-called *United Provinces* (or Dutch Republic) that declared independence from Spain in 1581. The independence of the United Provinces was formally recognized in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648; they form what we know today as the Netherlands, including the provinces of Holland and Zeeland. The southern provinces, which comprise most of modern Belgium and Luxembourg as well as parts of western Germany and northern France, remained under Spain's control well into the eighteenth century, and are referred to as the *Spanish Netherlands*. While the Spanish Netherlands were predominantly Catholic, most of the inhabitants

of the United Provinces affiliated themselves with the Reformed Church. I use the term *Reformed* in preference to *Calvinist* because the Reformed themselves rejected that term, which had been coined by their opponents. Although their faith was influenced by John Calvin, other important reformers were involved in its foundation as well.¹⁷

The third group, the *Hamburgers*, were Germans from Hamburg, one of the great trading cities of the Holy Roman Empire; I distinguish them by that name from all other Germans for reasons of clarity, although the ruling authorities of the time (in Portugal, for instance) frequently did not. From the beginning of the ninth century through the beginning of the nineteenth, the empire played a central political role in Europe. Yet for all its historical importance, it was a singularly indeterminate entity. There was permanent uncertainty about its legal character, and the emperor held power to very different degrees over its diverse parts. Princes (*Landesherrn*) ruled most of the several hundred territories of the empire, which in the early seventeenth century covered an area including what today would be Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands, as well as parts of France, Italy, and Poland. Scattered across that area were some 50 to 60 free imperial cities, which were subject only to the emperor. The empire was primarily a legal entity, connected by its feudal system, its shared laws, and the two imperial courts of last resort, the Reichshofrat and Reichskammergericht. Despite the empire's multiethnic composition, a growing sense of its German core led to its official denomination as "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" in 1512. Yet the link between the empire and the German nation (that is, the people who were ethnically and linguistically German), was never precisely defined. Hamburg, although not formally an imperial city until 1769, was in practice an autonomous, self-governing city-state of the empire.

Lastly, I have followed certain naming conventions. The names of Portuguese merchants, whether living in Portugal or Hamburg, are rendered in the modern Portuguese manner. The names of German and Netherlandish merchants are written in modern German, Dutch, or French if I draw predominantly on sources from Hamburg, and in Portuguese if I draw predominantly on sources from Portugal.¹⁸ This decision reflects both the source documents and the merchants' varying degrees of assimilation. I have included life dates as necessary to distinguish among different bearers of one name. The names of rulers are rendered in the language of the countries they ruled; the kings who governed during the Iberian Union are therefore noted in accordance with the Spanish tradition: that is, as Felipe II (of Spain) rather than Filipe I (of Portugal); Felipe III (Spain) rather than Filipe II (of Portugal), and Felipe IV (of Spain) rather than Filipe III (of Portugal).

Conclusion

The merchants who plied the trade route between Hamburg and Portugal in the seventeenth century led lives marked profoundly by the experience of migration and foreignness. Merchants from Hamburg and the Netherlands moved to Portugal, and Portuguese and Netherlandish merchants moved to Hamburg. In Portugal foreign merchants were well received; the king had been dependent on them at least since the beginning of the overseas expansion in the fifteenth century, and he still needed them in the seventeenth. They provided foodstuffs, weaponry, munitions, shipbuilding materials, and copperware for Portuguese domestic consumption, war, conquest and trading ventures, and they were buyers of Portugal's imports from Africa, India, and Brazil. They were also an important source of funding for Portuguese enterprise. For this reason, qualified foreign merchants were often granted a legal status that was in some respects superior to that of their local colleagues. Merchants from Hamburg had an additional advantage: they belonged to a neutral city, and so could always trade freely with the Iberian kingdoms. Their colleagues from the United Provinces, England, France, and other countries, in contrast, were often constrained in their trade by embargoes and other impediments associated with the armed conflicts of the time.

Foreign merchants enjoyed a social prestige in Portugal that kept pace with their privileged legal status. Hamburgers often arrived in Portugal at a young age and with few assets, yet within a generation or two many of them managed to rise high on the social ladder. Their integration was facilitated by the Portuguese Church's openness toward other Europeans. The merchants' Lutheran faith was tolerated as long as it was practiced in private, and, more important, conversion to Catholicism was fairly uncomplicated; it was the gate opening the path to integration and the catalyst of advancement in Portuguese society. Once having converted, foreigners could join brotherhoods and be appointed as familiars of the Inquisition, accepted into military orders, and even granted titles of nobility.

Nearly all of these avenues to success and respectability were closed to the local New Christian merchants. Although they were Portuguese by birth, and their families had likely been Catholic for a century or even longer, they were suspected of never really having renounced Judaism. This suspicion produced both attitudes of chronic unwelcome and periodic clashes with the Inquisition, and came along with an array of discriminatory laws that hindered the New Christians' full participation in society. All this impelled many of them to leave the country.

The foreign merchants who settled in Hamburg were received far more ambivalently than their counterparts in Portugal. Hamburg at the turn of the seventeenth century was a largely independent city-state whose prosperity was

built on intermediary trade. It protected this trade with laws, medieval in character, that distinguished between aliens and citizens, and disadvantaged the former in their opportunities to pursue commerce in the city. Some Netherlandish merchants became citizens in Hamburg shortly after their arrival. But the legal status of the rest, and of the Portuguese merchants, was regulated by collective alien contracts and by alien laws. These included a ban on trade between aliens without a citizen intermediary (*Gasthandelsverbot*). Although the ban was lifted in 1604 on a variety of goods, it continued to restrict trade in some of the most crucial commodities; free trade in grain, wine, and salt remained limited to citizens of Hamburg until about 1653. Merchants' trade turnovers reflected this inequality. Citizens traded most heavily in the necessities that the ban reserved for them, while aliens concentrated on less crucial goods, such as wax and dyes (in the case of the Netherlanders) and wax, cloth, and sugar (in the case of the Portuguese).

Despite these disadvantages, foreigners, and especially the Netherlanders, played a powerful role in Hamburg long-distance trade. In 1619 the Netherlanders accounted for almost half of that trade, and the Portuguese for a bit less than 5 percent. In that year there were 138 Netherlandish merchants and 32 Portuguese merchants active in Hamburg (that is, about 25 percent and 6 percent respectively of the total merchant population). Furthermore, in 1632 and 1647 the Netherlanders and Portuguese together accounted for a good half of the value of the goods traded between Hamburg and the Iberian Peninsula. Each nation's share in the Portugal trade fluctuated between 20 and 30 percent. In the more extensive trade with Spain, however, the Netherlanders accounted for about 40 to 50 percent of total turnover, and the Portuguese for only about 10 percent.

Foreigners in Hamburg suffered other disadvantages, too. Jews could not become citizens. Christians could; but to be a Christian and a citizen was not enough to obtain administrative or government office in the city and the political influence that went with it. For that it was necessary to be a Lutheran, and the Lutheran clergy seems to have been disinclined to accept foreigners for conversion. While the alien contracts with the Portuguese stressed their Jewishness and contained disciplinary provisions specifically aimed at their religious identity, the Netherlander contracts were neutral in terms of religion and focused on their members' economic and social rights. In 1653 the Netherlander contracts ceased to be renewed, and the individual alien contracts that replaced them for those who did not seek citizen status conferred a higher degree of individual liberty. The city treated the Portuguese Jews very differently; by maintaining collective contracts it permanently established their distinctive corporate position.

Even those Lutheran Netherlanders who were in principle eligible for political office rarely found their way into the city's ruling circles until the end of

the seventeenth century. In only a few instances did they achieve high office, and only very exceptionally did they marry into old city council families. Still, both Reformed and Lutheran Netherlanders became actively engaged in the Commercial Deputation, which, after its founding in 1665, helped greatly to integrate the Netherlandish merchants into Hamburg's economic organization. It did not, however, integrate the Portuguese Jews, as deputies were elected by the Honorable Merchant, a body that de facto, if not de jure, barred Jews from membership. In not recognizing Jewish merchants as equals, it gave the lie to its claim to represent (as well as regulate) all Hamburg long-distance merchants.

Local politics aside, however, in the seventeenth century the merchants' ethnic and religious backgrounds, and even their personal assets, mattered little in the Atlantic trade. Commerce was often conducted by way of reciprocal commissions in which merchant correspondents in different cities and of more or less equal status cooperated with each other. This permitted flexible networks that let merchants respond without delay to the exigent demands of the time: war, embargo, religious persecution, migration, and so on. When a correspondent was lost for any such reason, others were readily available, either in the same place or nearby. This flexibility was enhanced by some important innovations that promoted independent enterprise. The cities hosted ancillary supports such as multilingual brokers and notaries, financial and insurance facilities, public information services and a postal system. There also arose a legal substructure for sustaining individual merchants and safeguarding their goods, as well as the police and judicial machinery for enforcing it.

With arrangements like these at their disposal, none of the nations analyzed in this book functioned as segregated entities – at least not in business. Their trading networks were not homogeneous, either ethnically or religiously. Merchants acquired the trust and reputation critical in trade principally through compliance with established mercantile norms and through recommendations from trusted colleagues, not only of their own nations. Family bonds were of major importance too. Not only did they stabilize business relations over the long term, but they also brought with them such financial advantages as ready credit, the provision of guarantees, and the ability to acquire assets in the form of gifts, dowries, and inheritances. In Portugal, where conversion was relatively easy, many Hamburgers and Netherlanders married Portuguese women, so that the business relationships emerging from marriage often transcended the bounds of both nation and religion. In Hamburg, most merchants married within their own group, and trading relations tended to be somewhat narrower ethnically and religiously.

Still, family was not an infallible formula for success. Businesses based on family relationships could be destroyed by family conflicts, which were often

triggered by migration and ensuing religious conversion. In this area too the experience of a merchant depended on the nation he belonged to. The conversion of a Hamburger or Netherlander to Catholicism might cause ripples of distrust among his family and trading partners at home. But for the Portuguese, the Inquisition made the consequences of conversion much more serious, even in Hamburg. Merchants who affiliated with a Jewish community in northern Europe exposed their relatives in Portugal to severe reputational, financial, and physical danger. This placed a serious strain on family relationships.

Conversely, the ongoing threat of the Inquisition on the Iberian Peninsula meant that New Christian businessmen there, whether of a merchant's own family or not, were riskier trading partners than Old Christians or foreign colleagues. A New Christian might be arrested or have to flee unexpectedly to avoid arrest by the Inquisition, and even if he managed to save himself, any goods entrusted to him would be seized. Because of this risk, even the Portuguese Jews in Hamburg sometimes preferred Hamburgers or Netherlanders to New Christians as their trading correspondents in Portugal. Jewish-New Christian trading networks were much more fragile, and therefore less competitive, than those among merchants of other nations.

Portuguese-Jewish merchants trading with the Iberian Peninsula were also less mobile than their Netherlandish and Hamburgish colleagues. Any travels to their old homeland exposed them to the Inquisition and put not only their own lives at risk, but also the lives of local family members and trading partners. Furthermore, such travels were forbidden by the boards of the Jewish communities in the diaspora, lest during their sojourns they be impeded in their practice of Judaism, or tempted to abandon it altogether. Once they had emigrated, therefore, the Portuguese could maintain old business contacts only with difficulty, and establishing new ones in their former home country was an even more daunting proposition. While the Hamburgers who settled in Portugal often sent their children back to their old homeland for training and to reinforce their trading contacts, the Portuguese living in Hamburg could not do the same. Sooner or later, inevitably, trading relationships between the Portuguese Jews and their colleagues on the Iberian Peninsula broke down.

Finally, the Iberian refugees were confronted with danger and discrimination even in Hamburg, where they received only limited protection from the City Council. They had no state to back them when negotiating with their hosts, or to intervene in the event of crisis. The Hamburgers in Portugal received this kind of support from their city of origin, and, at the beginning of the century, from the Hansa; in Portugal itself they had their consul to turn to. And as we have seen, some of the Netherlanders in Portugal were protected by Hamburg's institutions too: not only Netherlanders who had become citizens of Hamburg but even those

who had only acquired alien status there. The Netherlanders had their own ruling authorities to call upon as well (except when relations between the states were strained by war), and in Hamburg especially the Reformed occasionally called for support by the government of the United Provinces.

Against the background of all these difficulties, the question arises why the Portuguese converted to Judaism in Hamburg, rather than simply remaining Catholic or converting to Lutheranism (as the Hamburgers and Netherlanders in Portugal converted to Catholicism). Surely the city of Hamburg was a factor, since it seems to have been more willing to welcome a vulnerable minority, one that would be modest in its demands and loyal to its benefactors, than one with a powerful political backing. But there was also, at least for some of the Portuguese Jews, the matter of desire. The Portuguese emigrants knew that their ancestors had been Jews, and this was a memory that most of them probably respected and valued. Their experience of discrimination and persecution by Christians and Christian institutions, especially the brutality of the Inquisition, may have further encouraged them to return to Judaism. A few convinced crypto-Jews among the early arrivals may have been sufficient to motivate and persuade waverers. And once the Portuguese-Jewish community was established, membership in it promised essential support to those who came later. Nothing, however, connected them to Lutheranism, and unlike the Inquisition in Portugal, which welcomed foreign Protestants into the bosom of the Catholic Church, the Lutheran clergy was not particularly receptive to converts. So it was to Judaism that they turned.

If we ask, as Herman Kellenbenz, Jonathan Israel, and so many others have done, what made the commerce of the Portuguese-Jewish merchants distinctive, we must come to conclusions different from theirs. It was not exceptional experience abroad or special linguistic skill. Nor was it outstanding economic success gained by any other means. All of the merchants who engaged in long-distance trade at that time possessed such experience and such skill. And the Netherlanders in Hamburg (perhaps the Hamburgers in Portugal, too, but we lack comparable data for them) were much more successful. As I explained, the Jews in Hamburg were less mobile than the other merchants, in that they had no way back to the Iberian Peninsula. Most of them spoke poorer German than the Hamburgers and Netherlanders in Portugal spoke Portuguese. Their networks covering the Iberian Peninsula were neither larger, more consolidated, nor more resilient than those of the other merchants. The Portuguese Jews did not differ from their Christian colleagues in ingenuity or adaptability, as Kellenbenz has proposed. Nor is there evidence that religious precepts had much effect on their commercial practices.

What really distinguished the Portuguese Jews from their Christian colleagues was their greater vulnerability and, linked to that, their commitment to strictly regulated communities. The leaders of those communities insisted on a

disciplined solidarity that eventually enabled them to advocate effectively with the host authorities for their members' interests. But it also incurred the obligation to engage with great dedication in the social and religious life of their communities. The boards held extensive power over community members and maintained a strict social control; they did whatever they thought necessary to keep individuals in line lest they damage the collective reputation of the Portuguese Jews, and thus the host city's willingness to harbor them. They were especially intent on keeping internal conflicts out of the public eye and resolving them privately. Most of the Portuguese-Jewish merchants acquiesced to the absolute leadership claimed by their principals, because they understood that outside the Jewish communities their livelihoods and survival were endangered. This was true for most of the Portuguese-Jewish settlements in the Atlantic diaspora, but it seems to have been especially so in Hamburg.

The situation was fundamentally different for the Netherlandish and Hamburgish merchants living abroad. The Netherlanders evidenced no sense of solidarity comparable to that of the Portuguese nation, either in Hamburg or in their diaspora, comparable to that of the Portuguese nation. They too had known persecution – an experience that did become part of their identity – but the Netherlanders were considerably more heterogeneous than the Portuguese. They belonged to two different language groups and to at least two different religious persuasions; in Hamburg, even their legal status varied. And while the Lutheran Netherlanders did eventually integrate into the Hamburg society, the Reformed congregation, and the supraregional network of other Reformed congregations in which it was embedded, remained a separate group. Like the Portuguese-Jewish community, the community of Reformed Netherlanders was led by an economic elite that defined the parameters of acceptable behavior and administered the sanctions necessary to enforce them. As among the Portuguese Jews, the most severe punishment was excommunication. Yet in their trade, the Netherlandish Reformed were not constrained to the same extent as the Portuguese: not in Hamburg, where they had more opportunities open to them, and especially not in Portugal, where they were so much less obstructed by the Inquisition.

The common identity of the Hamburgers living in Portugal was even less developed than that of the Netherlanders in Hamburg. They had no history of suffering to bind them together or to explain their settlement in a foreign land. There was no pressure to organize in Portugal because they rarely had to assert their rights there. They were socially respected; they learned the language quickly; and many of them easily assumed the religious identification of the majority. In the half-century between 1641 and 1691, 130 merchants and merchant apprentices from Hamburg formally converted to Catholicism in Lisbon. Their children often

spoke German so badly that they had to be sent to Hamburg to acquire fluency. The Hamburgers and Netherlanders living in Portugal also sought out social environments, like the Catholic lay brotherhoods, in which they could meet their compatriots. But membership in those associations was less a matter of self-defense than of advancement. A merchant could derive professional benefit by serving on their boards. Conversion and the possibilities it opened up paved the way to the most influential business circles in the kingdom.

Wherever they dwelled, the expatriates of all three nations lived with the fact of foreignness, an experience that fostered in them a wish for companionship and society among their own people. But the wish differed in intensity according to how much the host society opened to them its social resources, and also according to the way they wanted to live their nation's identity. The particularity of the Portuguese Jews was their permanent special status not as merchants, but as a social and religious group. They attracted more attention – from their contemporaries as well as from historians – not because there was anything special about them as merchants, but because they were less integrated and less assimilated into the culture in which they lived. Whereas other groups of foreign merchants melded into the surrounding society in one or two generations, the Portuguese-Jewish merchants retained their own identity, remaining clearly identifiable by their language, by their customs, and by their religion.