THE FAMILIARITY OF STRANGERS

The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period

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INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades it has become increasingly common to refer to Jewish merchants and other trading diasporas as "cross-cultural brokers." But although these diasporic communities have attracted more and more scholarly attention in conjunction with a global turn in the practice of historical writing, the study of cross-cultural trade has not progressed at the same pace. Though the expression is often invoked, an understanding of cross-cultural trade remains elusive. Rarely do historical studies offer a descriptive and analytical explanation of the ways economic cooperation worked across geopolitical, linguistic, and religious boundaries. To add to this conceptual murkiness, historians use the expression "cross-cultural brokerage" in reference to a variety of activities, including intellectual exchanges and diplomatic negotiations. Economic historians, for their part, have turned cross-cultural trade into an abstract litmus test of modernity—the formative stage in the creation of impersonal markets in which contracts and enforcing institutions inspired anonymous buyers and sellers to bargain with little interest in the linguistic, religious, and ethnic identities of others. Thus recent and influential studies about cross-cultural trade in medieval Europe and the Mediterranean region derive actors' behavior from theoretical postulates more than they document it empirically.

In this book I adopt a narrow definition of cross-cultural trade, but it is one that forces us to consider the economic as well as the social, legal, and rhetorical determinants of commerce. I do not consider an instantaneous transaction between two strangers to be an instance of cross-cultural trade. Such exchanges have occurred everywhere since time immemorial; they involve no credit and limited risk because traders usually can inspect the merchandise. Rather, the expression designates prolonged credit relations and business cooperation be-
between merchants who shared implicit and explicit agreements about the rules of exchange but who, because of historical patterns beyond their control, belonged to distinct, often legally separated communities. More specifically, I look at commission agency between merchants who shared no blood, kinship, or ethnic ties. More than any other type of contract, commission agency involved such ample delegation of powers to an overseas agent that it was difficult to monitor by legal means alone. I hope to show that cross-cultural trade as thus defined is a prism through which to reexamine important aspects of the history of early modern European commercial society.

What enabled strangers to cooperate? Which economic and legal institutions were at the foundations of cross-cultural trade? And what were the social and cultural implications of the practice? The descendants of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 or forced to convert to Catholicism in Portugal in 1497 provide interesting subjects for addressing these questions. A small but commercially vibrant segment of Jewish society, Iberian Jews, or Sephardim, were full participants in the European commercial society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and yet strangers to it. The most socially integrated group of Jews in Europe at the time, they remained a much-stigmatized minority.

Classic and recent studies of the history of Iberian Jews in the early modern period have illuminated the geographical dispersion and interconnectedness of this diaspora, its unique organization and cultural location within Judaism, and several dimensions of its economic activities. What fascinates me is the role of Sephardim as insider-outsiders in early modern European commercial society. To focus on their business ventures is to grapple with one of the ways in which Sephardic merchants led lives that were at once insular and outward-looking. Trade was a major vehicle of their acculturation, a channel of close personal interaction between Sephardim and non-Jews, and the rationale behind new policies of toleration toward Iberian Jews in several European port cities. The pursuit of profit was a powerful means of bringing strangers into contact, making them familiar to one another, and sometimes turning them into reliable business allies. And yet neither the day-to-day commercial relations nor the government policies that encouraged business interaction among strangers ever led to or aimed to create a commercial society that was genuinely cosmopolitan. By this I mean that commercial society was not harmonious and undifferentiated but was fully conscious of differences between Jews and non-Jews. The Familiarity of Strangers insists on the innovations generated by cross-cultural trade but also challenges the assumption that the ability to lend money and delegate decisions to strangers was naturally coupled with the dissolution of corporate boundaries, the rise of individualism, and more tolerant attitudes.

This study follows a group of Sephardic merchants as they settled in Livorno, a port city in Tuscany, in the 1590s and began to occupy important niches in the competitive trade encompassing the Mediterranean and Atlantic Europe. They also specialized in the gem trade with India at a time when the Mediterranean is usually conceived as peripheral to intercontinental commerce. It examines the way in which they negotiated their status with regard to the policies passed by the Medici grand dukes of Tuscany, the Roman and Iberian Inquisitions, and the French Crown, the way they helped shape commercial links between the Italian peninsula, the Ottoman Empire, and northern Europe, and the way they effected a truly global exchange of Mediterranean coral and Indian diamonds. In reconstructing the activities of these merchants, I concentrate on the way they conducted business with non-Jews and whether and how their modus operandi changed with the identity of their agents and the type of transaction. A plurality of business organizations—ranging from the family firm to the joint-stock chartered company—coexisted in most parts of early modern Europe. Furthermore, every merchant used a combination of personal ties, market deals, and legal contracts to overcome the risks of long-distance trade. I am interested in whether the combination of these components varied by group, by region, and by type of transaction, rather than in tracing the evolution of different business forms over time.

Ingrained social norms more than legal prescriptions barred Sephardim from forming an international cartel or entering into long-term partnerships with non-Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. How, then, did a close-knit, endogamous, and relatively small diaspora that operated through small-to-medium-sized partnerships become a force in long-distance and cross-cultural trade? After all, no more than fifteen to twenty thousand Sephardic men and women in the aggregate lived in Venice, Livorno, Bordeaux, Bayonne, Hamburg, Amsterdam, London (after 1656) and in smaller settlements in the Levant, North Africa, and the Caribbean, and only a fraction of them was active in commerce and finance. The Sephardim based in Livorno, moreover, were only indirectly involved in the Atlantic trade. They traded in areas, including the Ottoman Empire and the Indian subcontinent, where until the late eighteenth century Europeans lacked the hegemonic power they acquired through plunder and human exploitation in the Americas.

In spite of their small numbers, Sephardic merchants conducted business with actors ranging from friends and family to strangers. In order to explain how they went about doing so, I revisit the role of state-sanctioned institutions in rendering market relations more impersonal. It is a gross but fair generalization to claim that historians for the most part assume that blood ties and putative
likeness (a shared religious or ethnic identity and other allegiances that were perceived to be natural) forged bonds of trust that gave trading diasporas significant competitive advantages, whereas economists examine the efficiency with which different governments enforced legal norms that dissolved such bonds and generated impersonal markets. Economists like Avner Greif recognize the importance of social ties and cultural norms, but nonetheless emphasize the processes by which legal authorities loosened family and community obligations over time.5

Nowhere have these processes been universal or sequentially progressive. In their activities, Sephardic merchants combined social incentives, shared norms about the conduct of commerce, and legal commitments to secure their agents’ cooperation. In the selected ports of continental Europe where they were encouraged to settle, Sephardic Jews were equated with Christians in their capacity as merchants—that is, they enjoyed secure property rights and had access to the same civil and commercial courts as did Christian merchants. This general principle, however, never became a universal rule, because the rights and obligations of Sephardim were always defined locally. In England, the early modern European society that epitomizes the power of commerce to open up new avenues of social mobility and religious tolerance, Sephardim were readmitted only in 1656. Moreover, as aliens rather than subjects of the Crown, they were not really equals in colonial trade.6 Everywhere across Europe, at any rate, Sephardic Jews suffered from restrictions on their social and political rights, some of which affected their economic organization (beginning with the prohibition of Jewish-Christian marriages). But legal restrictions and rights do not tell the whole story. In fact, Sephardic merchants built commercial solidarities across ascriptive categories of collective identities and in many cases did so by circumventing legal prohibitions (and thus might not have been able to count on the support of state authorities).

One of the striking outcomes of the early modern European commercial expansion was, in the words of a comparative historian of pre-modern legal systems, the creation of “an uneasy trust” that made cross-cultural exchange possible: the emergence of “routines that generated, if not trust, at least firm expectations about behavior.”7 These routines did not imply a totalizing sense of trust between those involved in the exchange. Nor did they necessarily rest exclusively, let alone primarily, on the intervention of mighty tribunals. In many cases, these routines grew from customary legal norms and social systems of interlocking interests that rendered expectations more predictable and created the necessary incentives for cooperation among strangers. What follows is an attempt to uncover which routines were available to the Sephardim of Livorno and which ones they created; how their position in local society conditioned the ways in which they operated in the market; how exactly their family and communitarian organizations, in Livorno and across the diaspora, affected their business dealings with other Sephardim, with coreligionists, and with non-Jews; and what role juridical tribunals, political protection, and diplomatic concessions played in their economic strategies.

LIVORNO, A HALF-FORGOTTEN REALITY

The flourishing of Jews in Livorno was due to ad hoc policies that the Medici grand dukes of Tuscany promulgated in order to attract Iberian refugees. Particularly important were charters issued in 1591 and 1593 known as livornine, which extended to Jews privileges unmatched in other Catholic societies. These concessions competed with those that Dutch Jewry soon came to enjoy. Livorno, however, was not Amsterdam. It was considerably smaller in size, did not command the same centrality in international commodity and financial markets, and did not burst with intellectual vibrancy and heterodoxy to the same extent. In Tuscany, moreover, Jews were not a forceful presence in state finances or military contracts. Consequently, none of the Sephardic merchants based in Livorno ever attained the prestige and affluence of Dutch Sephardic financiers and diplomats such as the Lopes Suassos, Nunes da Costas, Pintos, or Nunes Belmontes. And yet after the mid-seventeenth century, the Jewish community of Livorno became the second largest Sephardic settlement in the West after Amsterdam—a position that it retained for the following century, after which the Western Sephardic diaspora began to lose primacy. Livorno did not have a stock market or a colonial empire, but since roughly 10 percent of its inhabitants belonged to the Jewish community, it was the European city with the highest proportion of Jewish residents.8

Although not a comprehensive history of Livorno Jewry, this book sheds light on the history of this community during the first half of the eighteenth century, the period that historians have studied the least.9 More important, it continues to chart what Jonathan Israel has called the “diasporas within a diaspora,” that is, the evolution of different and overlapping Sephardic networks.10 It focuses on the Mediterranean after 1670, when the Middle Sea disappears from Israel’s account and from most studies of early modern European trade. It examines old and new connections that Western Sephardim established with the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Although no longer the center and motor of international trade, the Mediterranean and the Italian peninsula were not cut off from the riches and the power struggles that followed the dramatic expansion of European com-
The eighteenth century witnessed a revival of European (and especially French) trade in the Mediterranean. European states waged war on one another in the region and confronted the Ottoman Empire militarily and diplomatically, striving to extend their economic influence. It is telling that the English stationed more troops in Gibraltar and Minorca than in the whole of North America or India before 1750. In 1682 a French merchant reported from Aleppo that, in addition to the caravans that came from Baghdad throughout the year, every summer a large convoy arrived that included more than fifteen thousand camels carrying Indian cotton textiles, Persian raw silk, indigo, and spices. American goods and Asian products made their way to Livorno via Lisbon, Cadiz, Seville, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Amsterdam, and London. Sephardic merchants thrived on these imports.

From the mid-seventeenth century until the rise of Marseilles after 1715, Livorno was the principal redistribution center of the Italian peninsula and probably the most important European port in the Mediterranean. On a typical day in March 1686 an English vessel sailing from Cadiz to Livorno unloaded 8 boxes of indigo, 3 barrels of cochineal, 10,000 Spanish silver coins, 22 boxes of sugar, and a wealth of other commodities. Another English ship arriving from Algiers followed, carrying an even richer and more diverse cargo that ranged from pearls to salted fish, meat, vegetables, cacao, linens, wool, grain, cheese, civet (a precious Indian fragrance extracted from a foxlike animal), and "Chinese oranges." Anxiously awaiting these shipments along the docks in Livorno were merchants as diverse in origin, outlook, and religious affiliation as the commodities they purchased and sold. Their presence was the result of the livornine and other policies that attracted French, English, Dutch, Armenian, and Greek merchants as well as many Jewish families. In addition to a few Tuscans, Venetians, and traders from other parts of Italy, sporadic visitors from Russia, Africa, and Asia gathered along the docks and inside the countinghouses of Livorno.

Scholars of Tuscany have emphasized the way Livorno’s thriving commerce and diverse population contrasted with the religious obscurantism and incipient economic crisis in the grand duchy and the rest of the Italian peninsula. Foreigners and Jews played an uncharacteristic role in the life and the economy of this provincial city. Next to prosperous merchants, crowds of poor immigrants from the countryside, soldiers, mariners, and Muslim slaves lived and worked in this frontier zone on the coast of a small regional state of the Old World. I am less concerned with the atypical status of Livorno or with its internal socio-economic composition than with the similarities and differences in the ways in which it accommodated Jews in comparison to other European port cities with sizable Sephardic populations. Livorno does not conform fully to traditional divisions between northern and southern Europe according to which the Protestant North was commercially expansive and tolerant whereas the Catholic South was home to old aristocratic ideals and bigotry, but local legal and social conditions had an impact on the commercial undertakings of its Sephardic entrepreneurs at home and abroad.

Following the distinction made by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Familiarity of Strangers* is a history in the Mediterranean, rather than a history of it. This geographical location conditions several aspects of the story ranging from the composition and patterns of commodity trade to the presence of the Iberian and Roman Inquisitions. But though it was the main area of interest of Sephardic merchants based in Livorno, the Mediterranean did not mark the outer limit of their purview. Sephardim not only helped connect southern Europe to the Atlantic, but they also established a truly cross-cultural network with Catholics in Lisbon and Hindus in Goa, the capital of Portuguese India by which Mediterranean coral was shipped to India to be bartered for diamonds and other precious stones. The close examination of this niche market will illuminate the specificities of cross-cultural trade in a commodity chain that long resisted vertical integration and the monopoly of European joint-stock chartered companies.

**GLOBAL HISTORY ON A SMALL SCALE**

What unfolds in this book is a global history on a small scale. The far-flung connections developed by Livorno Sephardim dictate the global dimension of this project. The small scale of analysis responds to the desire to understand the inner workings of cross-cultural trade as well as the structural relations of political and economic power within which it took place. The result is not a global history as conventionally understood: a bird’s-eye view of oceans, continents, populations, and historical eras with the intent of capturing structural patterns of change over the centuries. I do not even offer a comprehensive history of all the branches of commerce or of all the places where Livornese Sephardim played a role. Rather, I follow their mercantile activities in order to understand how an intensively local and communitarian life coexisted with wide-ranging family and economic connections. I also have a predilection for connection that do not conform to the conventional map of geographical, political, and cultural borders of the time and that rarely figure in accounts of Jewish societies (hence the space devoted to the trade between the Sephardim of Livorno and a Brahmin caste of Goa). In this sense, my research participates in the interest among several historians of the early modern period to rediscover connection...
that once were obvious but have been obscured by layers of interpretative traditions.16

Writing global history on a small scale helps us move toward two important goals of this study. In contrast to the prevailing emphasis on the long-term evolution of commercial and credit institutions in early modern Europe, it calls attention to the simultaneous coexistence of a plurality of business organizations and the range of actors with whom a family partnership could deal. Moreover, in contrast to the tunnel vision that affects most historical studies in which trading diasporas are treated in isolation from each other it allows us to identify networks of people who might at first sight appear to be strange bedfellows.

The micro portion of this project centers on a business partnership—Ergas and Silvera—formed by two Sephardic families. It lasted from 1704 to 1746 and had a base in Livorno and a subsidiary branch in the Ottoman city of Aleppo. The survival of 13,670 original copies of letters written by Ergas and Silvera affords us a unique opportunity to scrutinize their business relations with coreligionists and strangers alike.17 This collection of letters is an invaluable source through which to reconstruct the codes of communication as well as the axes of trade of Livorno Sephardim. But the strategies of this one partnership did not occur in a vacuum. A macro analysis is therefore necessary to illuminate the changing patterns of the Sephardic diaspora, the structure of Jewish-Christian relations in Livorno, the customary and legal norms that governed long-distance trade, and the specific role played by family partnerships such as Ergas and Silvera in the Mediterranean and beyond. It demonstrates, for example, that Sephardic merchants never acquired a dominant position in the trade between Livorno and the Levant in the eighteenth century. At the same time, it shows how their influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Aleppo in particular, developed in tandem with the commercial and diplomatic initiatives of the French Crown in the region.

By combining micro and macro scales of analysis, I seek to accomplish several tasks. Most of the existing literature focuses on individual Jewish communities and their relations to local society and authorities (the Jews of Livorno, the Jews of Rome, the Jews of Venice, the Jews of Trieste, and so forth). Instead, I follow the trajectories of two families through multiple locations and thus recover both the local and the global dimensions that constituted their horizons. Analyzing the business operations of one partnership allows me to illustrate all of its networks instead of focusing solely, as most studies do, on the economic ties among members of a single diaspora. In so doing, I move beyond generic invocations of the importance of trust as a characteristic feature of trading diasporas. That an agent was of Iberian Jewish descent mattered to Ergas and Silvera because it came with a set of “multiplex relationships” (marriages, community membership, economic specialization) that increased incentives to cooperate. But as Ergas and Silvera’s story teaches us, neither blood ties nor a common religious identity guaranteed commercial proficiency and rectitude. Membership in the Sephardic diaspora at large—a diaspora that spanned several continents and oceans—facilitated but did not ensure bonds of trust among those involved in long-distance trade. Their commercial letters show that Ergas and Silvera preferred competent Sephardim to kin in northern Europe and maintained cooperative credit relations with agents as geographically and culturally distant as Hindu Brahmins in Coa. In the end, it was not an Indian agent but a Persian Jew who betrayed Ergas and Silvera’s expectations, accelerating their bankruptcy.

Such a global history on a small scale also has its limitations. Some derive from the availability of primary sources and the feasibility of the project. For example, commercial statistics for the regions I discuss are scarce, making it difficult to delve into systematic regional comparisons or weigh the activities of Sephardic merchants against broader commercial patterns. Global in ambition, this book offers only sporadic quantitative measures of commercial fluxes. A comparative perspective also is barely sketched, although, wherever relevant, I draw contrasts and parallels with other merchant groups in order to explain which specific social norms and institutional formations favored the Sephardim as cross-cultural traders.

One of the major challenges I faced in writing such a history is that its conclusions reassert the importance of historical contexts, and yet contexts in this perspective are multiple, mobile, and overlapping. The interlocutors and points of references for the protagonists—the Jewish diaspora, the Sephardim, specific circles of families connected by marriage and financial bonds, Livorno, Tuscan merchants, the Mediterranean, Atlantic Europe, the Indian Ocean, European maritime empires, and a broader range of merchant communities—cannot be thought of as concentric circles in order of importance or as immutable and uniform contexts. Sephardic merchants based in Livorno both adapted to existing economic, social, legal, and political conditions and shaped new environments and new connections by their presence and their activities. In order to grasp the manifold contexts that defined the quotidian existence and broader horizons of these Sephardim, I have combined synchronic and diachronic narratives. This study uses micro and macro scales of analysis as a way to examine the tension between normative structures and the ways in which groups and individuals manipulated them.18 In the history of European trade, an overdue emphasis on change over time often flattens the multifaceted experience of trading diasporas. I try to rescue my subjects from the grand narratives that have depicted trading diasporas...
either as indispensable, even heroic, communities that resisted the rise of European states and colonialism until the mid-eighteenth century or as introverted groups that, despite their vitality, could not transcend the intrinsic limitations of their insularity to participate fully in impersonal and competitive markets.

The history of Sephardic merchants in early modern Livorno was bracketed most profoundly by two dates: 1591, the date of the first of the two exceptionally liberal livornine, and 1796, when Napoleon's troops first occupied Livorno and initiated a series of regime changes that transformed the lives of the Jews there and the fate of the port in radical ways. In between these two dates, the Sephardic community of Livorno went through its formative period, experienced its golden age, and coped with its progressive decline. Though I highlight the differences between various phases in the history of the city and its Jewish merchants, the chapters of the book unfold thematically as well as chronologically.

Diasporas, Trust, and Cross-Cultural Trade

When I first began to read Ergas and Silvera's letter books, I was intrigued by the mention of several non-Jews with whom they exchanged favors as well as remunerated services. These agents included Venetian merchants whose names were unmistakably Catholic, Florentine and Genoese correspondents in Lisbon, a host of other Christian agents across Europe, and, as mentioned, a group of merchants who, I soon discovered, belonged to the leading Hindu caste in Portuguese India. This heterogeneity seemed to be at odds with much of the conventional wisdom about trading diasporas, according to which Jews traded with other Jews, Armenians with Armenians, Quakers with Quakers, and so forth.

Two features of Ergas and Silvera's business relations with non-Jews attracted my attention. First, they appeared to be central to the partnership's activities and occurred in locations such as Lisbon and Goa where the legal protection of property rights for Jews was weak. “New” Christians (Jews forced to convert in Portugal and their descendents who were often accused of having remained Jews at heart) were not well tolerated in Portuguese territories after the early sixteenth century. Tribunals of the Inquisition were set up in Lisbon, Evora, and Coimbra in 1536 and in Goa in 1563. They routinely seized the goods of New Christians as a way of eradicating “crypto-Judaism.” These persecutions induced growing numbers of New Christians to emigrate and severely weakened the ties between those who remained and the Sephardic diaspora. How did Sephardic merchants, who by the early eighteenth century rarely chose their business agents from among New Christians in mainland and overseas Portuguese territories, govern their cross-cultural trade in these regions? Second, Ergas and Silvera's incursions into the Indian Ocean raise questions about their relations with European states and the chartered companies that controlled the maritime routes around the Cape of Good Hope. The evidence appears sufficiently compelling to prompt a reexamination of the core suggestions and potential pitfalls of the historical literature about trading diasporas.

In recent decades diaspora has emerged as an important subject across academic disciplines ranging from sociology to literary criticism, postcolonial studies, anthropology, and political science. Since the appearance of Philip Curtin's seminal Cross-Cultural Trade in World History in the mid-1980s, historians have devoted particular attention to the study of diasporas that thrived in long-distance trade. Curtin borrowed the expression "trading diaspora" from Abner Cohen, an anthropologist specializing in the study of West Africa, who fifteen years earlier had defined a trading diaspora as a "moral community" that lives in dispersal but "constrains the behavior of the individual and ensures a large measure of conformity" via social and ritualistic interaction. Curtin's work built on this formulation to tackle a wide variety of cases from antiquity to the mid-eighteenth century, across all continents.

When Cross-Cultural Trade in World History was published, the historiography of transregional social formations was still in its infancy. Predictably, Curtin fell into the trap of what the sociologist Rogers Brubaker calls "groupism: the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogenous, and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life." Twenty years later, the same tendency prevails in much of the literature on cross-cultural trade and is responsible for the widespread conflation of "trust" and "diaspora." For J. F. Boster, "personal trust based on a common religion and carefully fostered relations of scattered families" explains the flourishing of Huguenot business ventures in the Atlantic after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Recently C. A. Bayly spoke of "communities of mercantile trust" in reference to the trading diasporas that helped create a more globally interdependent world before the nineteenth century. With reference to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia, Yuri Slezkine maintains that "the Jews owed their economic success to strangeness, specialized training, and the kind of intragroup trust that assured the relative reliability of business partners, loan clients, and subcontractors." Two specialists in the history of Armenian merchants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries praise them for the "ethos of trust" and the "shared moral and ethical norms underlying it," which "helped the Armenian trading houses to avoid the relatively rigid and costly operation of the hierarchic system of organization practiced by the English." Others have gone further in collaps-
ing group identity and trust. For Sushil Chaudhury, "that the Armenians often acted as a group rather than as individual entrepreneurs is a result of the pride they took in their identity." 26

These statements evoke a romanticized view of merchant communities as harmonious, cohesive, and full of pride. They also fail to explain the workings of the phenomena that they purport to illuminate: they assume that trust is a self-evident attribute of a merchant community. Recently, in a notable study of Sindhi businessmen from the region north of Karachi, the historian Claude Markovits became one of the first to challenge this assumption. He remarks, for example, that sibling rivalry serves as an antithesis to essentialized notions of trust. 27 Other historians have combined empirical studies and theoretical reflections to chart the specific social norms and institutional forces that governed business cooperation within a trading diaspora. Rarely, however, have they asked whether the same norms and forces also worked in fiduciary relationships with strangers. 28

Economists have launched a more corrosive attack against commonsensical understandings of trust. Oliver Williamson suggests that we eliminate the term from our vocabulary altogether and replace it with "calculativeness," arguing that standard economic theory can explain problems that are addressed by invoking trust. 29 Following this logic, we would not distinguish between intra- and inter-group trust but would treat each utility-maximizing individual independent of his or her social, linguistic, and ethnic identities or other characteristics and examine solely the information, incentives, and threats that induce him or her to act cooperatively or opportunistically.

The distance that separates Curtin from Williamson is wide. Trust, trading diasporas, and cross-cultural trade have indeed long been sites of passionate controversies between rational choice theorists and even the most ecumenical followers of Karl Polanyi, for whom economic action is always embedded in social structures and capitalist rationality is a recent invention. Disputes between formalist and substantivist economic historians took a new turn after the 1970s, when the new institutional economics rehabilitated the role of government institutions in the development of capitalism against the prevailing neo-Smithian orthodoxy. These scholars often use long-distance trade as ammunition. According to the influential Douglass North, "the development of long-distance trade, perhaps through caravans or lengthy ship voyages, requires a sharp break in the characteristics of an economic structure." This sharp break must include new forms of impersonal contract negotiations, for which state policies and institutions provide the best incentives and security. In North's words, "history in consequence is largely a story of institutional evolution in which the historical performance of economies can only be understood as a part of a sequential story." 30

While the concept of "institutional evolution" in theory allows for the influence of unwritten rules and social norms, in the work of North and his followers it leaves little space for stateless diasporas to generate change.

The new institutional economics proved especially influential in the historical literature about the European commercial expansion in the Indian Ocean. The historian K. N. Chaudhuri embraces it in his studies of the English East India Company and other northern European chartered companies, which he refers to as "bureaucratic economic organisations." 31 Concurrently, he also dismisses the theoretical validity of the concept of trading diasporas. He argues that "the general characteristics of human behaviour" (by which he means economic rationality), and not merchants' spatial dispersion, social interdependence, and informal organization, account for the role of Jews, Armenians, and other groups active in the Indian Ocean in the early modern period. 32 An important collection of essays edited by Jean Aubin and Denys Lombard about numerous merchant communities in the Indian Ocean that first appeared in French in 1988 implicitly refuted this view, but its fragmentary quality and the reluctance of its editors and contributors to theorize diminished its impact beyond the field. 33

Since 1989 the work of the economic historian Avner Greif has been stirring up new and animated debates about the role of institutions in long-distance trade and about the relation between business organization and cultural beliefs more broadly. Criticizing what he perceives to be a restrictive characterization of institutions by North and others, Greif defines institutions as systems of "social factors that conjointly generate a regularity of behavior," and by social factors he means "rules, beliefs, norms, and organizations." 34 His contributions have propelled a broader trend in the social sciences, and economics in particular, that emphasizes the interdependence rather than the mutual exclusion of social norms and codified rules. So-called private-order economics has illuminated historical contexts—whether in developing or industrialized countries—in which contracts and property rights are enforced without any help from state institutions. 35

Greif revisits the "commercial revolution" of the medieval Mediterranean by comparing the business organization of a specific group of North African Jews (known to scholars thanks to the work of S. D. Goitein and often referred to as Maghribi Jews) with that of Genoese merchants. 36 For Greif, Maghribi Jews in the eleventh and twelfth centuries represent a case of socially enforced market governance in which individual self-interest and multilateral chains of information transmission permitted merchants to monitor the integrity of their overseas agents. The letters that circulated among members of this trading diaspora discouraged fraud because everyone boycotted those caught cheating. Greif
calls this business organization a "community responsibility system." After the
thirteenth century, however, Genoese merchants implemented a more efficient
"individual legal responsibility system," in which the use of limited liability
partnerships allowed merchants to renege on a contract with one agent and hire
another at no additional cost and with no negative impact on their reputation.

Greif's examples show that the business organization adopted by Maghribi
Jews was inefficient because their boycotts only worked against other Maghribi
Jews. In contrast, notarial deeds indicate that Genoese merchants sometimes
established agency relations with non-Genoese. 37 It follows that for cross-cultural
trade to become the norm, new contracts, a formal legal code, and effective tri­
bunals are necessary. This is one of the main lessons that Greif draws from his
study of late medieval Genoa. His analysis offers a remedy to tautological and
generic invocations of the importance of trust for trading diasporas. But it also
simplifies the available evidence. First, it is not clear that courts and legal con­
tracts played no role in agency relations among Maghribis. Moreover, even if
individual legal responsibility became the standard in medieval Genoese trade,
other social and legal obligations clashed with what Greif calls "individualistic
cultural beliefs." In thirteenth-century Genoa, for example, merchants passed
their debts to their sons if they went bankrupt and had to settle scores regarding
all offenses against family members. 38 Any reader of Goitein will also wonder
why interfaith trade disappears from Greif's recounting of medieval Mediterra­
near commerce. Goitein and his successors studied Maghribi Jews as a case of
integration of Jewish and Muslim societies, but in Greif's work the same com­

In brief, in Greif's account, the contrast between the Maghribi and the
Genoese organization of long-distance trade is stark. However, Greif also con­
cedes that "theoretically, the community responsibility system can foster inter­
community impersonal exchange." 41 Indeed, a significant portion of his work
aims to explain the variety of institutions that can solve the two fundamen­
tal problems of exchange: opportunism and expropriation. Following his lead
while also departing from some of his premises, I illustrate how, as late as the
eighteenth century, individual legal responsibility coexisted with elements of
the community responsibility system, even in instances in which commission
agency involved merchants from far-away and heterogeneous communities.

As these comments suggest, a lot is at stake in studies of cross-cultural trade.
They affect competing interpretations of capitalism and its historical forms.
Curtin opened his book with the claim that "trade and exchange across cul­
tural lines are perhaps the most important external stimuli to change, leaving
aside the immeasurable and less-benign influence of military conquest." 42 This
conviction has found fertile terrain among scholars of world history who con­
ceive of cross-cultural trade primarily as a macro phenomenon. They investigate
transregional trade, convergent and divergent structural trends, or the activities
of trading diasporas that operated across predictable geopolitical lines, but they
pay little or no attention to the description of how strangers made deals. 43 To
both North and Greif, on the other hand, cross-cultural trade is a micro phe­
nomenon involving individual transactions between nonrelatives and strangers.
But in their studies, the workings of cross-cultural trade follow from theoretical
postulates about the creation of more secure institutions for arbitration and doc­
tinal innovations rather than from the analysis of actual transactions between
strangers. 44 This book is an attempt to bridge the gap between these two perspec­
tives. It examines the macro context in which cross-cultural trade took place but
also dissects specific transactions and networks.

In 1622 Gerard Malynes, the author of an important early English manual
for merchants, asked "whether a merchant may traffyke with Turks, Heathens,
Barbarians, and Infidels, and performe promise with them. 45 The question be­
trays the continuing influence of Christian theology, which justified the pursuit
of profit during the commercial revolution of the Middle Ages by equating a
reputable merchant with a good Christian and a good citizen. Non-Christians,
and in particular Jews involved in money-lending in medieval Italian towns,
were by definition excluded from the virtuous circle that identified skilled and
industrious merchants with honorable citizens and devout Christians. 46 Malynes
did not provide a full-fledged answer to his own question, but his work is an
implicit admission that he was concerned with how (rather than whether) Christian
merchants could make credible agreements with "Infidels." After the Reforma­
tion and after the admittance of Sephardic Jews to key European port cities,
the social and symbolic unity of Christendom diminished in force. Meanwhile,
the expansion of European intercontinental trade in the sixteenth century in­
creased the need to extend credit to non-Christians. Although it exposes the
existence of lexical and conceptual frameworks in which prejudice coexisted
with pragmatic forms of tolerance, Malynes's question was more rhetorical than
prescriptive.

Writing about ninety years later, Daniel Defoe returned to the same quan­
dary. In 1710 he wondered, "how do we trade among the Turks, and trust the
Mahometans, one of whose doctrines, in the Alchoran, is, not to keep faith with
Christians?" This time, Defoe gave a straightforward answer to the question. He
was convinced that "by a just, punctual, and honourable practice in trade," Muslim merchants (and, by extension, other infidels) gained the trust of Europeans, sometimes more than did fellow Christians.47

Again, Defoe's confidence that the lure of profit made merchants of all stripes blind even to the most deeply ingrained religious suspicion should not be taken literally. His argument should be read against the backdrop of contentious intellectual and policy debates about the boundaries of English commercial society. But Defoe's assertion that experience and individual credibility mattered more than religious affiliation opens up a productive line of inquiry, and not only for intellectual historians. The Sephardim of Livorno did enter into durable business relations with Christians and Hindus.48 Neither of the two prevalent approaches that I reviewed above—the belief in the importance of a common religious or ethnic identity or the emphasis on legal institutions that governed credit and property rights—alone provides a satisfactory answer to the question of how Sephardic merchants managed cross-cultural business relations. I suggest instead that we examine the creative combination of group discipline, contractual obligations, customary norms, political protection, and discursive conventions that assisted merchants such as Ergas and Silvera in trading beyond their own diaspora.

My approach incorporates the principal lessons of social network analysis and a growing theoretical and empirical literature concerning trust. I do not consider trustworthiness as a stable attribute of an individual or a group. I thus evaluate the choices made by Ergas and Silvera as the result of their strategic and calculative interactions with other actors. But I also analyze the way in which they managed collective symbolic representations, shared communication codes, and coercive social norms that were beyond their control. While examining the mechanisms of cross-cultural trade, in essence, I aim to avoid the fallacies of what the sociologist Mark Granovetter has called "oversocialized" and "undersocialized" conceptions of social action.49

COMMERCE AND CULTURE: JEWS, MERCHANTS, AND CROSS-CULTURAL BROKERS

The Familiarity of Strangers is a social and economic history of Livorno Sephardim. But we cannot employ the expression "cross-cultural trade" without an understanding of the concept of culture. What did cultural differences mean to those who took part in these exchanges? How can we extract meanings from norms and practices? And how can we square eighteenth-century debates about the political and symbolic role of commerce with the modalities of conducting economic transactions at the time? These questions are ideologically fraught and methodologically complex, not least because intellectual history, social history, and economic history part ways more often than they enter into dialogue with one another. I do not aspire to outline a coherent answer to all these questions, but I do hope to unsettle anachronistic and homological connections between culture and economics.50

When I refer to culture, I have in mind both what united and what separated Jews and non-Jews. In the early modern period, merchants of disparate backgrounds expressed their expectations and pursued their economic goals by drawing from progressively more uniform legal customs and rhetorical traditions. Business letters are the most revealing documents of translocal and cross-cultural mercantile customs. As the etiquette of business letters became more standardized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it facilitated fiduciary relations among strangers. At the same time, religious traditions, social practices, and legal norms continued to separate Jews from non-Jews. I focus on the tension between these two coexisting cultural spheres. Shared discursive traditions as reflected in business correspondence were powerful tools of economic integration but cannot be interpreted as reflections of social realities. The cosmopolitan language of business letters did not automatically spawn cosmopolitan feelings of tolerance, mutual respect, curiosity, and appreciation of differences.

For Greif as for North, culture and beliefs can be inferred from economic norms and practices. The presence of laws protecting property rights or of contracts allowing for a clearer division between capital and labor, for example, is exemplary of a society that fosters individualism at the expense of corporate belonging.51 One of the troubling by-products of this kind of economic reductionism is that it presumes a homogeneous society in which everyone participates in the same patterns of change regardless of religious, class, gender, or other differences. This holistic image leaves us ill-equipped to analyze the role of Sephardic merchants or any other corporate group in the economy of early modern Europe. Curtin, too, for different reasons, embraces a static notion of culture. To him, cross-cultural trade before the nineteenth century was predicated on naturalized divisions between groups, and yet it eventually resulted in the assimilation of a trading diaspora into the "host society."52 Perhaps for this reason Jews are conspicuously absent from his wide-ranging survey. More recently, an assorted group of literary scholars and cultural critics engaged in "diaspora studies" has destabilized conventional notions of culture by negating concepts of essence and purity and underscoring the porosity of all boundaries.53 Again, to historians of the early modern period these propositions are as inspiring as they
are frustrating. Few groups exemplify cultural crossover more than the Western Sephardim. Clean-shaven Sephardic merchants in Amsterdam even appropriated the concept of purity of blood in order to define their collective identity in opposition to other Jews.44 And yet it would be plainly inaccurate to discount the power imbalance that characterized their status in the Christian world as well as the legal and cultural barriers that separated them from the dominant society. In order to account for the Sephardim's position, I have turned my attention to the insights of the anthropologist Fredrik Barth, a pioneer of studies of interethnic relations who found that sustained economic relations between different ethnic groups do not necessarily dissolve social and cultural boundaries.45

'Communitarian cosmopolitanism' is the expression that I use to encapsulate the experience of Sephardic merchants who, in Livorno as elsewhere, synthesized multiple traditions and mingled with non-Jews but did so within the framework of a corporatist society of unequal and separate groups. The forms of communitarian cosmopolitanism changed from place to place, but everywhere they sought to contain fluidity and regulate the interaction between Jews and Christians. As settlements of Iberian Jews became progressively safe and stable across continental Europe in the course of the seventeenth century, legal prescriptions, social organization, and collective self-perception encouraged more clearly defined boundaries between Jews and Christians (except in France, where Iberian refugees were tolerated as "Portuguese merchants" rather than as Jews). During the sixteenth century, ambiguity characterized the religious identity of most Jews who had left Iberia. Among the members of the "Portuguese nation" across Europe and the Atlantic, conversos and Old Christians were not always distinguishable. By the 1630s, persecution by the Inquisition and the growth of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish congregations in Venice, Livorno, Hamburg, and Amsterdam led most New Christians to return to or embrace Judaism outside Iberia. More than a century spent with covert identities was not wiped away, to be sure. The historian Yosef Kaplan has called the Amsterdam Sephardim "New Jews" not only because they or their progenitors had been raised as Christian converts but also because they devised a new, less orthodox form of Judaism.46 Their acclimatization to Christian culture was visible not only in their commercial practices, but also in their dress, their forms of self-governance, and their intellectual pursuits. Though fluent in several European languages, only a few among them mastered Hebrew beyond the basic requirements of synagogue attendance. This unique synthesis of normative Judaism and Gentile decorum undoubtedly made business relations between Sephardim and non-Jews easier, but it was hardly comparable to postemancipation assimilation.

Several biographical studies have recently illuminated the extraordinary careers of individuals (mostly men, the majority of them of high social status) who, as part of the new connections formed during the early modern period, moved across states, empires, and religious divides, sometimes taking up manifold identities over the course of a lifetime.47 These biographies are important correctives to nostalgic or imperialistic misappropriations of the past but should not lead us to underestimate the internal and external pressures toward the separation of social spheres that shaped Christian-Jewish relations in early modern Europe. Individual Jews and Christians interacted economically, intellectually, socially, and sometimes sexually. As collectivities, however, they thought of themselves and understood one another as distinct. Secular and ecclesiastical authorities and centuries of theological anti-Semitism helped safeguard boundaries between Jews and Christians in Catholic and Protestant Europe, with the different modalities that I investigate. Religious and lay leaders of Sephardic communities aimed at the same goal.48

Overall, cross-cultural trade created ample opportunities for communication and cultural exchange but did not dissolve legal and social barriers. The Sephardim's habit of using Christian pseudonyms when trading with merchants in Iberia is at once a mark of the ease with which they moved in multiple, even antagonistic geopolitical and cultural contexts and a conventionally accepted fiction used to bypass legal restrictions. Ergas and Silvera employed this expedient countless times in their letters, bills of lading, and powers of attorney, which they signed under different aliases—most commonly Ventura and Joseph Benedetti and Henrique Silvera, but also Prospero Salvador del Monte, Pietro and Paolo del Forte, Raphael and Giuseppe del Monte, Daniel and Manuel De Felicc, Jacopo and Simon Oliva, Giovanni Francesco Stella, Giovanni Silvestro Petriini, Dionigi and Ferdinando del Bene. The Medici consented to this device.49 Dutch Jews adopted the same tactic. An Amsterdam notarial document dated 1671 records that Francisco and António Gutierrezes Gomes carried on business under as many as fifteen different names.50 Having both a Christian and a Hebrew name did not necessarily mean that a merchant shifted between religions, not even when crypto-Judaism was a widespread phenomenon.51 Italian Jews, too, who were prone to religious wavering, often had two names, one Italian and one Jewish—a sign of their familiarity with and immersion in dominant Catholic culture but not of their endless mutability.52

Trade was not the only occasion for communication between Jews and Christians. Intellectual exchanges intensified in the seventeenth century. Christian scholars who became interested in the Hebrew language and biblical scholarship met and conversed with learned rabbis. Mutual appreciation did not always characterize these conversations in Baroque Italy. Indeed, some of them oc-
curred under duress, as when Hebrew instructors were coerced into tutoring Christian pupils and princes. Although not an international capital or a court, Livorno became a crossroads for foreign savants and dilettantes. The nearby University of Pisa further stimulated intellectual dialogue. In the first half of the eighteenth century a Livorno rabbi, Joseph Attias (1672–1739), engaged in polite and secular debates with eminent and amateurish Christian scholars while also serving as an elected officer in his community. Attias stood out among his colleagues, most of whom lived in a more insular environment.

Although Sephardic merchants were immersed in Christian culture and society, Christian merchants could be comfortable using Judeophobic language at the same time as they sealed business deals with Jews. The market—as a physical location and as an ongoing process of negotiation—created new opportunities for encounters and cross-cultural fertilization. Commerce encouraged new conversations between strangers and generated new tools with which to curtail the uncertainties that derived from trading with strangers. In the instances I examine, however, the market was not synonymous with anonymity, individualism, or respect, but, rather, was another arena in which early modern power relations were redefined, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes contentiously.

This book seeks to recapture the openness and the strictures of cross-cultural trade. It is an economic history sensitive to the multiple experiences of the marketplace. In no way does it advocate a simple replacement of “the market” with “culture” and “society.” Rather, it strives to show how a global mercantile culture (with its laws and its customs) coexisted with highly localized and segmented social and legal arrangements. It focuses less on the concept of identity than on social networks, power, and institutions. It is more concerned with intertwined networks of communities than with isolated individuals, more with partial acculturation and cultural accommodation than with fluidity, more with prescriptive styles of communication than with the putative self-evidence of the universal pursuit of profit.

In April 1747 the partnership of Ergas and Silvera was settling its bankruptcy. In a note accompanying the legal agreement signed by the required two-thirds of their creditors, Ergas and Silvera declared that they had run a commercial house in Livorno for more than 160 years. They were exaggerating: the firm had been in business only since late 1704. But its senior partner, Abraham Ergas, could claim legitimately that his ancestors had been reputable merchants in Pisa and afterward in Livorno since the 1590s. A lesser family in the Tuscan port, the Silveras owed much of their affluence and prestige to their association with the Ergases, whom they helped to set up a branch of their business in Aleppo in the early eighteenth century. By the time they went bankrupt, Ergas and Silvera still commanded respect in town. A business adversary who had contributed to their failure said that they were “among the most important and influential in the land” ("i quali sono de' primi e de' grandi della terra").

This chapter reconstructs the vicissitudes of the Ergas and Silvera families in Livorno and their commercial association. It may seem cliched to begin a study of Sephardim with a focus on family ties. After all, stories of migrant communities and diasporas are invariably filled with narratives of far-flung relatives wrenched apart by forced separation, bonded by blood, and transformed by the experience of displacement. But my aim is more than descriptive. Only by mapping the precise family connections that Sephardim developed across time and space can we begin to analyze their strategic choices and the benefits and limitations of their reliance on kin (both cognate and affine) as business allies.

Scholars and amateurs struggle to gather accurate genealogical information about early modern Sephardim. Many obstacles complicate even the most basic reconstruction of life events. When available, archival documents are scattered
BNL Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon
BRM Biblioteca-Archivio "Renato Maestro," Venice
ACV Archivo della Comunità Israelitica di Venezia
CCM Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et de l'Industrie, Marseilles
AAKou Archives antérieures à 1801
GAA Gemeentelijk Archiefdienst, Amsterdam
NA Notarieel Archief
PICA Archiven der Portugese-Israelitische Gemeente in Amsterdam
AC/V Archivio della Comunità Israelitica di Venezia
CCM Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et de l'Industrie, Marseilles
Milol Archives antérieures à 1801
GM Gemeentelijk Archiefdienst, Amsterdam
NA Notarieel Archief
P/GA Archief en der Portugees-Israelietische Gemeente te Amsterdam
1614-1870
HAC Historical Archives of Goa, Panaji, Goa
PDCI Petições despachadas do Conselho da Fazenda
JFB James Ford Bell Library, Minneapolis, Minnesota
NATH Nationaal Archief, The Hague
HR Hoge Raad van Holland en Zeeland
NSL Arquivo Paroquial da Igreja de Nossa Senhora do Loreto, Lisbon
PRO Public Record Office (now the National Archives), Kew
PROB Prerogative Court of Canterbury and Related Probate
Jurisdictions: Will Registers
SP Secretaries of State, State Papers, Foreign
SPL Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London
XCHR Xavier Center of Historical Research, Alto Porvorim, Goa
MHCJF Mhamai House Collection, French
MHC/JE Mhamai House Collection, English
MHC/IP Mhamai House Collection, Portuguese

Whenever available, folio numbers are indicated. For unfoliated documents, the date serves as a reference.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY AND UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

5. Different etymology have been offered for the word marrano, but all authors concur that it had a derogatory meaning (Farinelli 1925; Révah 1959–60; N. Roth 1995: 3–4; Mechozian 2001: 298).  

INTRODUCTION

2. See n. 44. In a rare example, Baskes (2005) applies the new institutional economic theory to a case study of cross-cultural trade in eighteenth-century Mexico.  
3. Since the 1920s, economists, economic sociologists, and economic historians have debated the role of personal ties, markets, and hierarchies in diminishing transaction costs and uncertain. For classic and recent formulations that are relevant to my study, see Ben-Porath 1980; Williamson 1985; North 1990: 27–69; Powell 1990; Gelderblom 2003; Langoreaux, Rall, and Temin 2003.  
4. On the demography of Sephardic settlements, see Chap. 2. Studnicki-Gihert (2007: 41) estimates that twenty thousand New Christians and Portuguese Jews were living in the diaspora across Europe and the Atlantic in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. E. Samuel (2004: 90) calculates that no more than fifty thousand New Christians resided in Portugal in the seventeenth century, but as we will see, commercial ties between them and the diaspora grew increasingly weak in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.  
5. For a detailed discussion of these scholarly interpretations, see below in this introduction. A notable exception to this trend is the account of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Parisian credit markets by Hoffman, Postel-Vinay, and Rosenthal (2000).  
9. Renzo Toaff and Lucia Frattarelli Frischer focus on the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Jean-Pierre Filippini is primarily concerned with the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See the works by these authors cited in the references list.  
12. ANP, AE. B/III/234. Contemporary accounts place greater stress on the importance of caravan trade after the European oceanic ventures than does the historical literature. See, e.g., J. Green 1776: 4.  
13. ASF, MNP, 2328A.  
16. Important remarks are found in Subrahmanyam 1997.
17. As a standard procedure, Ergas and Silvera's business papers, including their letters, were seized by the court of the governor of Livorno on 23 January 1748 during their bankruptcy trial. They are currently preserved in a miscellaneous collection in the State Archives in Florence called Libri di commercio e di famiglia. This collection includes more than fifty-five hundred folders containing private business records of Tuscan merchants, mostly small-size traders, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Most of these documents are fragmentary, and the court proceedings to which they were originally attached cannot be easily identified. The business papers of Ergas and Silvera are mentioned in Cassandro 1983a: 112n27; 1983b: 384n9. Their archival classification has changed since Cassandro's publications appeared, and two more ledgers were found during the reindexing conducted in the summer of 2003. The letter-books are now labeled as ASF, LCF, 1931, 1935–1939, 1941, 1945, 1953, 1957, and 1960. Among the few historical studies based on records from this miscellaneous archival series is Paolo Malanima's (1982: 265–70) analysis of the trading operations of Tommaso Baldi, a Florentine silk merchant of the early eighteenth century.
18. On the synchronic and diachronic dimensions (synchronic meaning "history as a temporal context" and diachronic meaning "history as transformation") of historical investigation, see Sewell 2005: 182–83. The microhistorical perspective tends to privilege synchronicity (Ginzburg and Poni 1979: 188) and investigates the tension between individuals' agency and the multiple normative frameworks with which individuals come into contact (G. Levi 1991; Revel 1996).
19. The Napoleonic Wars marked a more drastic turning point for Livorno and its Jews than did the death of the last Medici ruler in 1737, when the Grand Duchy of Tuscany came under the rule of Francis Stephen of Lorraine, the husband of the Habsburg heiress Maria Theresa. From 1737 to 1765 Tuscany was not formally integrated into the territories of the Habsburg monarchy. Francis Stephen left the regency of Tuscany in the hands of the.prenotary Prince Marc de Craon. Craon was followed by Comte Emmanuel de Richcourt and Marshal Antonio Botta Adorno. After 1765 Maria Theresa's son, the future emperor Peter Leopold, ruled in person for twenty-five years. His son Ferdinand III succeeded him in Florence in 1790 and remained in power until 1801, and again from 1814 to 1824.
20. A. Cohen 1971: 267, 274; Curtin 1984. In British English "trade diaspora" is preferred to "trading diasporas," but the two expressions are often used interchangeably. Curtin's approach is also indebted to Karl Polanyi for the notion of embeddedness and the role of port cities in premodern markets (Polanyi 1944; Polanyi, Aremberg, and Pearson 1957). Among the many works about trading diasporas that acknowledge explicitly Curtin's influence are S. F. Dale 1994: 2; Baghdants McCabe 1999: 200; S. C. Levi 2001: 85–120.
24. Slezkin 2004: 121. For Yuri Slezkin, who focuses on the modern period, all trading diasporas (including Armenians, Parsis, Jains, overseas Indians and Chinese, and Lebanese in Latin America and the Caribbean) display the same features, but Jews are exemplary. Slezkin's notion is reminiscent of Bonacich's "middleman minority" (1973).
28. See, e.g., Aslanian 2006; Prange 2006. For an early and judicious assessment of the interdependence of social and legal enforcement in the economic strategies of trading diasporas, see Braude 1985.
34. Greif 2006: 30, 382–83. Elsewhere Greif defines institutions as "the non-technologically determined constraints that influence social interactions and provide incentives to maintain regularities of behavior" (Greif 1998: 80). See also Aoki 2001.
36. On the commercial revolution of the medieval Mediterranean, see Lopez 1971. Greif draws from the treasure trove of documents discovered in the Old Cairo Geniza in 1890. The business papers of the Cairo Geniza are discussed in Goitein (1967–93). Uдовitch (1970a, 1970b, 1977), Gil (2003), and Margariti (2007), among others. The community of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Fustat (Old Cairo) discarded all writings bearing God's name (which according to Jewish law could not be destroyed) in a geniza storeroom rather than burying them, as was common practice; this helped ensure their survival. Naturally, most business records contained references to God.
38. The community responsibility system resembles what Goitein calls "formal friendship," but Greif's overall analysis overlooks several features of the Maghribi commercial organization that were stressed by Goitein (1967–93, i: 169–92). These included the use of a variety of contractual agreements (family partnerships, commenda contracts, commission agencies, loans, and powers of attorney), Rabbinic and Islamic courts, moreover, settled some commercial disputes (ibid., i: 172, 179, 251; Goitein 1973b: 93–101, 177–81, 208; 167–216, 241–53, 542–43; Ackerman-Liebrman 2007; Margariti 2007: 199–205). Uдовitch (1977: 72) estimates that one in twenty business transactions recorded in the Geniza letters were scaled by a formal contract. He also documents the use of Islamic law in the drafting of such documents (1970b: 128–30). Moshe Gil (2003: 275) goes as far as to argue that "all of the transactions [recorded in the Geniza] we carried out by partnerships" rather than via the unpaid services of
overseas agents, and he emphasizes the role of Jewish and Muslim legal institutions in enforcing these contracts. See also the exchange between Edwards and Ogilvie (2008) and Greif (2009).


40. Goitein may have used excessively modern categories in speaking of "a period of relatively free trade" and "a spirit of tolerance and liberalism" with reference to the Fatimid Caliphate (Goitein 1967-93: 1: 29; see also Goitein 1973a). An erudite and philologically minded historian, he nonetheless relates that partnerships between Muslims and Jews "were nothing exceptional" (Goitein 1967-93: 1: 72; see also pp. 85, 105, 116, 262, 381). Partnerships between Jews and Muslims are also mentioned in Udovitch (1970b: 126) and Gill (2003: 280-81). From Olivia Remie Constable (1994: 68-70, 71) and Roxani Eleni Margariti (2007: 155-57, 213-14) we learn that Maghribi merchants in Aden and other Indian Ocean ports sealed partnerships with Muslim and Hindu merchants, officials, ship owners, and captains more commonly than those in medieval Spain did with Muslims and Christians. All of the Genoese business letters are written in Hebrew script (although the language is Arabic) and thus are not ideal sources for documenting commercial relations between Jews and Muslims. They nonetheless contain references to cross-cultural business cooperation, which Greif glosses over. He also offers few explanations for the decline of the Maghribi "coalition" (Greif 2006: 84, 176n16). For Goitein (1967-93: 1: 38, 149) it was the mid-thirteenth-century rise of the Mamluks in Egypt, who were averse to trade and religious toleration, and Genoa's naval superiority that put Maghribi Jews out of business.

41. Greif 2006: 328. He demonstrates this point by showing that, during a transitional period in the economic history of medieval Europe, the community responsibility system was hacked by local states, facilitated impersonal exchanges even in the absence of limited liability partnerships (ibid.: 309-33).

42. Curtin 1984: 1.

43. Notable examples are found in Chaudhuri 1986; Abu-Lughod 1989; Bentlev 1993; Fernand Braudel (1972-73, 1981-84) forshadowed this approach, although he did not use the expression "cross-cultural trade" to define any of his projects.

44. In a famous paper for new institutional economic historians, Milgrom, North, and Weingast (1990) argue that judges facilitated cross-cultural trade and financial deals between merchant bankers who arrived annually from afar at the Fairs of Champagne in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Greif (2006: 315-18) criticizes this paper for outlining a theoretical possibility without offering any empirical support. His claims about the efficiency of the Genoese legal system, however, are also based on the assumption that it worked as it was supposed to, and they do not include discussion of any case of contested contracts adjudicated by a Genoese court.


47. Defoe 1710: 13.

48. No business relations with Muslims in the Ottoman Empire are documented in the surviving papers of Erigs and Silvera, which do not, however, document the local activities of the Aleppo branch of the partnership. For the rare mentions of commercial associations between Sephardim and Muslims for trade in North Africa, see Chap. 3.

49. Granovetter 1985. I agree with Dario Gaggio (2006: 25) that, contrary to what critics have claimed, Granovetter's "embeddedness" is not another name for feel-good notions of trust and communitarianism but rather, is an analytical framework that is most useful for uncovering both the strategic and normative characteristics of social action.

50. For an inspiring theoretical approach, see Cerutti 2004.

51. For a critique of the way in which the new institutional economic history conceives of the relation between culture and economics, see S. R. Epstein 2000.


53. Classic examples are found in Hall 1990; Bhabha 1994; Clifford 1997.

54. Y. Kaplan 1989c.


57. Notable examples are found in García-Atenal and Wiegans 2002; Muchnik 2005; N. Davis 2006; Colley 2007.

58. A dissonant voice in diaspora studies, the social anthropologist Jonathan Friedman (2005: 143-44) notes that diasporas do not stand only for cultural mixing but often cultivate the preservation of group identity via endogamy and cultural and social homogenization.


60. Pieterse 1989: 76.

61. In 1570, a notary of Ferrara defended Righetto Marrano before the Inquisition of Venice by declaring that he had always known him as a Jew, although Righetto used a Christian name in order to trade with Catholic countries (Ioly Zorattini 1992: 39-40; Roth 1990: 249-50; Bertoli 1992.


65. See Chap. 7 for examples. Anthropological field work conducted in the marketplaces.
of Aleppo in the 1990s suggests that interfaith business cooperation coexists with a sense of difference and even mistrust between Muslims, Christians, and Kurds (Rabo 2004: 97–100).

1. DIASPORIC FAMILIES AND THE MAKING OF A BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

1. "A'vendo tenuto casa aperta di negozio nella suddetta piazza di Livorno per il corso di cento scasata e passa anni" (ASL, CGA: Atti civili spezzati, 2249, no. 953).

2. ASL, CGA: Cause delegate, 2500.

3. As a general rule, the first child to revert to Judaism in a New Christian family was named Abraham, and his sons took the names of other patriarchs (Isaac, Jacob, Israel). Thereafter, the first born child normally took his or her paternal grandparent's name, and the second child was named after the maternal grandparent. On specifically Sephardic naming customs, see Gaster 1901: 96; E. Samuel 2004: 4.

4. My approach differs from that of the "dictionary" of seventy-four Sephardic families published in Lévy 1999: 223–319, which uses the last name as the main criterion for outlining short family biographies on the basis of various secondary sources. Lévy's dictionary nonetheless remains the only attempt to define membership in the Western Sephardic diaspora on the basis of family ties and communitarian structures in three interconnected towns (Livorno, Amsterdam, and Tunis). In this chapter I occasionally signal the presence of individuals named Ergas or Silveira who might be closely related to those who are at the center of my investigation, but I also omit many more references when no clear relation to the Ergases and the Silveras of Livorno can be established. Ergas in this context was a recognizable Jewish last name, although not a common one. Silveira (also spelled Sylveira), on the other hand, was extremely widespread in Portugal among New and Old Christians, noble and common. The Silveras of Livorno do not seem to be related to the marrano poet Miguel de Silveira (Brown and Boer 2000) or to Rabbi Abraham Gomes Silvera of Tunis in three interconnected towns (Livorno, Amsterdam, and Tunis). For details about these policies, see Tavares 1982–84: 31–40.

2. "As a general rule, the first child to revert to Judaism in a New Christian family was named Abraham, and his sons took the names of other patriarchs (Isaac, Jacob, Israel). Thereafter, the first born child normally took his or her paternal grandparent's name, and the second child was named after the maternal grandparent. On specifically Sephardic naming customs, see Gaster 1901: 96; E. Samuel 2004: 4.

4. My approach differs from that of the "dictionary" of seventy-four Sephardic families published in Lévy 1999: 223–319, which uses the last name as the main criterion for outlining short family biographies on the basis of various secondary sources. Lévy's dictionary nonetheless remains the only attempt to define membership in the Western Sephardic diaspora on the basis of family ties and communitarian structures in three interconnected towns (Livorno, Amsterdam, and Tunis). In this chapter I occasionally signal the presence of individuals named Ergas or Silvera who might be closely related to those who are at the center of my investigation, but I also omit many more references when no clear relation to the Ergases and the Silveras of Livorno can be established. Ergas in this context was a recognizable Jewish last name, although not a common one. Silveira (also spelled Sylveira), on the other hand, was extremely widespread in Portugal among New and Old Christians, noble and common. The Silveras of Livorno do not seem to be related to the marrano poet Miguel de Silveira (Brown and Boer 2000) or to Rabbi Abraham Gomes Silvera of Tunis in three interconnected towns (Livorno, Amsterdam, and Tunis). For details about these policies, see Tavares 1982–84: 31–40.

10. R. Toaff (1990: 336) speculates that Abraham Ergas reached Pisa from Iberia via Flanders. The list of members admitted to the Jewish community of Pisa between 1525 and 1637 is lost (Frattarelli Fischer 1879: 201), making it difficult to establish their provenance. Testifying before the Inquisition of Madrid in 1661 that he had met Isaac Ergas (a former New Christian) in Livorno, Cristobal Mendez alias Abraham Frıcisco Silveira claimed not to know where exactly in Portugal Isaac was from (MN, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 165, exp. 12, fol. 551; Grazoid 2004: 1, 122, 136–39). Some Ergases were said to be from the Portuguese town of Trancoso (see López Belinchón 2000: 23) as cited in n. 23). The Jewish surname Ergas is documented in Portugal as early as the mid-fourteenth century (Tavares 1982–84: 222).


12. Henry Kamen (1988: 4) revised old estimates of the number of Jews who left Spain in 1492, which varied between 150,000 and 400,000, suggesting figures as low 40,000 or 50,000 in an attempt to downplay the consequences of the decree issued by Ferdinand and Isabella. Tavares (1982–84: 253–55) and E. Samuel (2004: 90) also suggest a low figure (30,000) on the basis of tax records. Jonathan Israel (1992: 367) initially accepted the figure of 120,000. He later estimated at 70,000 the number of those who left Spain for Italy, the Ottoman Empire, and Flanders in 1492 (Israel 1998: 5–6). Other estimates, such as 400,000 (Swetschinski 2000: 157) or 500,000 (Sutton 2004: 31–40).

14. Patents were first issued to Portuguese refugees in 1578 in Ferrara, which until about 1577 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1573–74 remaining the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula. In 1547 and 1577–74 remained the main Sephardic center of the Italian peninsula.