

The intercessory efforts of Diego D'Aguilar in support of the Jews of Prague expelled in 1744

Online talk given 6 May 2023 by Prof Michael Silber Professor Emeritus. Hebrew University Jerusalem)

Maria Theresa, queen of Austria and archduchess of Hungary and Bohemia, was known for her hatred of Jews. In December 1744 anti-Jewish state policy reached its peak and she ordered the expulsion of Prague's Jews. The story of how that evolved, and the opposition which eventually led to the return of the Jewish population, is the subject of this talk.

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Transcript slightly edited to remove repetition, 'umms', housekeeping messages and discussion of comms issues. Two screenshot images included.

Host

Thank you. Thank you, Sarah. And good evening, everyone. My name is François Genet. I'm teaching Modern Jewish History at University College London. And I welcome everyone to this evening's event, which is co-sponsored by the UCL Institute for Jewish Studies and the Institute for Polish Jewish Studies. This event will be recorded, and we hope this is okay with you. It gives me enormous pleasure to welcome this evening's speaker to what is the last event in the annual event cycle of the Institute for Polish Jewish Studies. It's not the last event for the Institute for Jewish Studies. We will hear probably from Vicky or Sarah about the next events for the Institute of Jewish Studies. Tonight's speaker is Michael Silber, Dr. Michael Kalman Silber from Jerusalem, who was a lecturer in Austrian Studies at the Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewery at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He earned his PhD in 1985 at the Hebrew University as the last PhD student, as I learned today, of the famous Jacob Katz. He had visiting positions in Harvard at the Central University in Budapest, at the Collège d'études en sciences sociales in Paris, at Stanford University and Yale University, and probably more places.

Host

More importantly, as I used to say, he's one of the most erudite historians of the century European history of the 18th and 19th century alive and an amazing scholar. He has published a monograph on the Jews in the Hungarian economy based on his PhD in

Hungarian economy between 1760 and 1945, and has published one of the most seminal articles in the *Postal History of Jewish Studies*, if I may say so, on the *Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a tradition*, publishing published in 1992, which my students have to read every single year because it is an enormously seminal contribution to understanding the dynamic of Jewish observance in the 19th century. Tonight, this evening, what we will hear is a lecture about a court Jew at the Viennese court in the XVIII. Century, Diego D'Aguilar, and the expulsion of the Jews of Prague, which goes back to a conversation we have since many years, Michael Silber and myself, in the context of the expulsion from Prague, which is one of the really important events of Jewish history in the 18th century, and on Jewish intercession. And I very much look forward to tonight's presentation.

I'm extremely grateful for Michael for having made his way to London, although he will speak, as you see, remotely, but he's actually in London.

Host

And we had a wonderful seminar this afternoon, which I found terribly inspiring. Michael, thank you so much for agreeing to give us in this talk. We will have 10 to 15 minutes at the end of tonight's lecture for questions and comments. But for now, the floor is yours. Michael, please.

Michael Silber

Thank you very much, François, for that very generous introduction. The title of my talk will be on the Baron Diego D'Aguilar and his intercession during the expulsion of the Jews from Prague in 1744/45.

As a sceptre symbolizing kingly power was placed in the hands of King Charles, I wondered whether the Archbishop would invoke the well-known blessing of the Patriarch Jacob that promised everlasting dominion to his son, Judah, *lo Yasur Shevet me Yuda*, the sceptre shall not depart from Judah. He did not, and I think it was a missed opportunity. This blessing was a pledge that served to reassure and console generations of Jews in the face of Jewish powerlessness in exile. Of course, it was also a father for anti-Jewish polemicists like Martin Luther, who mocked such aspirations to power as delusional, a futile refusal to acknowledge Christian supersession.

Some 50 years after the expulsion of the Jews from Prague in 1745, Israel Landau, the author of a popular book on 613 Commandments, wrestled with a challenge posed by number 173, the Commandment to Elect a King. How could it be fulfilled in time of How could Jacob's blessing of power be understood when Jews barely managed to subsist under the thumb of the nations?

Landau's resolution, the possession of a sceptre, need not be understood exclusively in terms of a crowned ruler, even one who exercises a measure of power can be said to possess a sceptre. Therefore, I quote,

"Ever since we have been exiled from our land, even though we have been humiliated by the nations, one of our nation has always attained greatness. At

times in this country, at times in another, during the reign of Emperor Francis I, a Jew found favour in his eyes. One of the exiled from Spain, Baron D'Aguilar, who worked so much for the benefit of Jews at the court of the empress Maria Teresa."

It is the diplomatic activities of Diego D'Aguilar a Jewish baron in Vienna who laboured as a schadelan, an intercessor, to stymie the harsh degrees of Maria Teresa, ordering the expulsion of Prague Jewry that will gauge the successes and limitations of Jewish power.

The D'Aguilar bore a noble title, no doubt, raised expectations that indeed the sceptre had not departed from Judah. Although the tale I am about to tell takes place largely in 18th century Central Europe, it also has a bearing on this place, London. For our protagonist spent 20 years of his life here, and at one point was even elected to the head of the Mahmud, the executive board of the Portuguese Jewish community.

It is in London, in Mile End Cemetery, that D'Aguilar was finally buried in 1759. I don't know whether his name is evoked here annually on Yom Kippur, when and distinguished members of the past are commemorated, as he was over many years in Vienna's Turkish community. If not in London. The name D'Aguilar is nevertheless enshrined throughout the landscape of the former British Empire, where it can be encountered in designations of street, peninsula, or cape in Hong Kong, as you can see on the map, or a town, Mountain Range, and even a National Park in Australia. These are testimonies to his descendants who serve the British Empire with distinction, high civil servants, and military men. One of them, Major General Sir George Charles D'Aguilar, served as the first lieutenant governor of Hong Kong and was the one who lent his name to these landmarks. Already within his lifetime, Baron Diego D'Aguilar had become a source of legends, a man with a mysterious past. It was whispered that he was a Christian grandee from Spain, a Duke, no less, who had converted to Judaism and now settled for a less exalted aristocratic title. Later, he was depicted as a fanatic Spanish inquisitor about to officiate over the burning at the stake of a young judaizing woman, only to discover the night before the Auto da Fe that he himself was of Jewish origin and the unfortunate victim, none other than his sister.

These legends were combined with a small historical biography, and an article first published some hundred years after his death by the Austrian poet Ludwig August Frankl. At the time, Frankl was also serving as Secretary of the Viennese Jewish Community. And while preparing its history, he explored its old 18th century Cemetery.

Among the graves of famous Ashkenazi court Jews, he was surprised to discover several tombstones that bore the names of Portuguese Jews. In mid-19th century, interest in what has been called a Sephardi Mystique, was stoked by publications about Conversos and the Inquisition, including novels by the talented English writer Grace Aguilar, who, however, was no relation¹ to our hero.

¹ Their relationship between Grace Aguilar and the D'Aguilar's is not yet certain

Intrigued by the unexpected presence of Portuguese Jews in Central Europe, especially a mysterious Moshe Lopes Pereira, mentioned on the inscription of his mother's tombstone, Frankl set out to collect whatever traces he had left behind in Vienna. Moshe Lopes Pereira, as he soon discovered, was the name by which Baron Diego D'Aguilar was called in the Jewish community. Khacham Ruso, of the Jewish community, of the Viennese-Turkish Synagogue, whose family roots lay in Istanbul, offer the first clues and some of the legends, while state archives provided some of the historical evidence.

Published in German in 1854, Frankl's short article in both legend and the history of the Aguilar was quickly translated into several languages, and two decades later, inspired a novel by the Orthodox rabbi and prolific author, Markus Lehmann². The Family Aguilar, as the book is called, went through numerous editions in German and has been translated into almost every European language, including Yiddish and Ladino, as an imprint in German, Russian, English, French, Spanish, and Hebrew to this very day. Leiman expanded on the theme of the Spanish inquisitor, but the novel was purely a product of his imagination, whereas Frankl's article did provide a kernel of historical truth. In particular, Frankl highlighted the role of D'Aguilar as a *schadelan*, an intercessor, who, by dint of his status as a Jewish nobleman with connections at the court, could exercise influence on behalf of threatened Jewish interests. Here, Frankl's dramatic passage of one such encounter, and I quote,

“One day, when Baron D'Aguilar was sitting in his room, one of his powerful friends entered, a man who enjoyed the highest confidence of the monarch. Without a greeting, he said, poor D'Aguilar, how I pity you. You and your co-religionists will have to take this staff once again. He left the room silently and without greeting, just as he had come. Diego D'Aguilar, terrified to the core of his soul, heard the warning and took the hint. He wrote a letter to his friend in Tamesvar Amigo, in which he begged him to rush off to Constantinople and deliver a letter which alone could save his co-religionists.

A few weeks after this event, a horseman with a long black beard arrived, whose turban and clothing belied his Oriental origins. He carried a large white letter with an enormous red seal. A strange writer said he had a letter from the sublime Port, the most powerful sultan to Her Majesty, the empress, that he himself personally had to deliver. The empress saw the Tugra, the Sultan's signature, and read the great Lord's letter, which stated, I hear that you want to ban the Jews from your extensive realm. It is not against the commandment of my prophet that they live in my kingdom. Send me all for the sake of their spirits and riches. Those who 'Who are poor and helpless shall be given travel money from my treasury. ' She was seized with a violent rage, realizing that a decision that had been made in her most secret council had been betrayed and had become known in Constantinople long before it was intended to be carried out.”

² Book The Family Aguilar by Marcus Lehmann is available via amazon USA and other publishers

This is a quote from Frankl's very dramatic presentation. But Frankl is actually reticent, even coyly parsimonious in filling in the factual details. He does not provide the name Maria Teresa, who at the time was Queen of Hungary, not yet an Empress. And he alludes only obliquely to the dire plan forestalled without revealing this specific historical event. In fact, the reference is clearly to Maria Teresa's decree, late in 1744, ordering the expulsion of Jews from Prague. Was there a historical basis to the Sultan's dramatic intercession?

With the Death of Emperor Karl in 1740, Europe was plunged into several years of war, contesting the right of his daughter, Maria Teresa, to inherit the Habsburg throne. Fought on several fronts, it was the battles conducted in the lands of the Bohemian Crown, today's Czech Republic, that most caused damage to Jewish communities as rival armies lost and regained territory, including Prague. When the Bohemian capital was recovered by the Habsburg forces, so at the end of 1744, the Queen ordered the immediate expulsion of Jews from the city. Soon after, she extended the decree, the decree to include the entire Kingdom of Bohemia as well as the neighbouring Margraviat of Moravia.

Mounting an impressive diplomatic campaign, Jewish notables throughout Europe joined forces to prod the various courts aligned to the Queen to intercede and have her revoke the harsh decree. These efforts were partially rewarded in that important heads of state, even close members of her family and entourage, did indeed submit appeals to the Queen in an attempt to dissuade her from these ruthless measures, alas, to no avail. While many of these efforts have been chronicled by historians, most importantly, the interventions in Britain and the Netherlands, this lecture seeks to throw light on those activities of Diego D'Aguilar that have been only hinted at, but have never been documented, namely the intercessions by the Pope and the Ottoman Sultan.

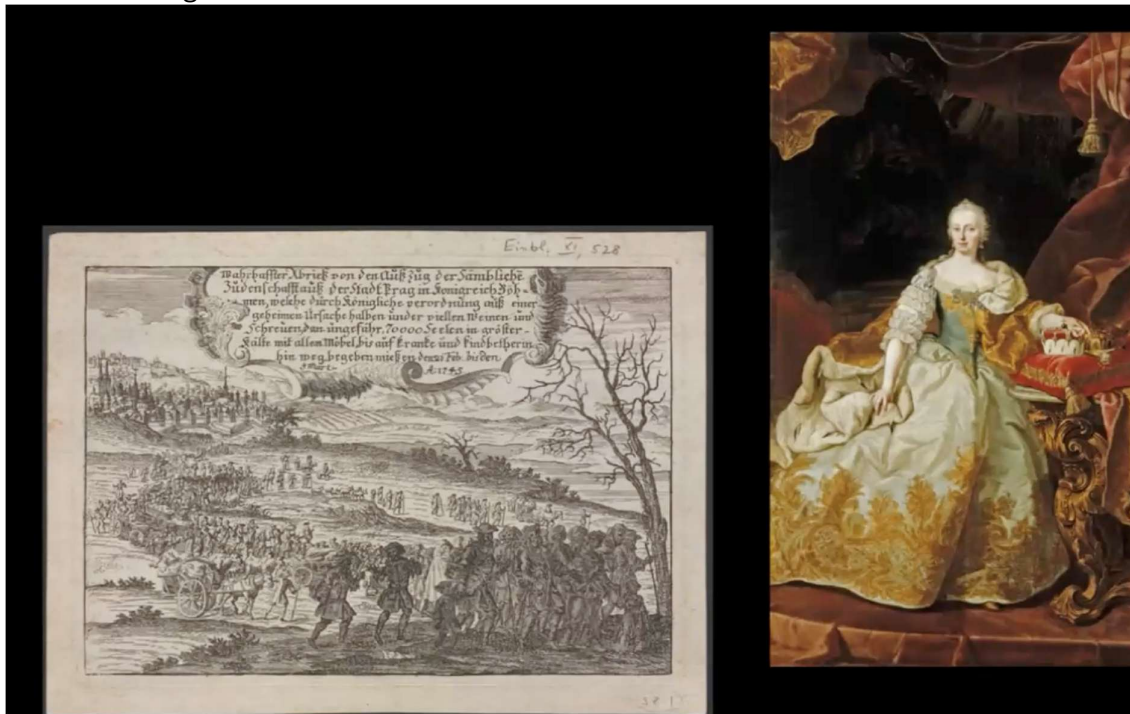
The first sessions of Jewish intercession in the time of the Prague expulsion were based upon brief statements in Hebrew chronicles and reports of the Dutch and English ambassadors in Vienna. Other sources came to light over the years, detailing the involvement of various kings, princes, lay, and ecclesiastical. But it was the discovery and publication in the 1930s of the correspondence of the Court Jew Wolf, Wertheimer, that greatly enriched the historical record, and first revealed the behind-the-scenes activities of the Jewish Schadlanim.

Wertheimer was the son of the immensely wealthy and learned Samson Wertheimer in Vienna, who had helped finance the Habsburg war effort at the beginning of the century, and whose numerous offspring had Allied themselves with the foremost court Jews families in Central and Western Europe. Well over a half a year between December 1744 and April 1745, Wertheimer, situated in Augsburg, coordinated almost on a daily basis the actions of a far-flung network of influential friends and relatives. From this correspondence, we learned that more than two weeks before the Queen ordered the expulsion on December 18th, 1744, rumours had circulated that a disastrous decree was in the offing. Yet in the very first letter of the correspondence, sent his son, Samuel, in Vienna on December first, that is two weeks earlier, Wolf seemed reassured that the worst could be averted with proper measures. And I quote,

“In my view, the noble Moses D’Aguilar, through the aristocrats and the Portuguese who have influence in the English court and the States General in Holland, will be able to come up with a recommendation and proposal for our mistress, the Queen and her Princess.”

That's in a nutshell, Wertheimer presciently laid out the principle path the diplomatic campaign would take in the next few months.

An appeal to local aristocrats, and calling on the influential Portuguese-Jewish communities in Amsterdam and London to marshal the intercession of the Protestant maritime powers who had steadfast wartime allies of the Queen. And note, at this very early stage, Wertheimer deemed it sufficient to rely upon one sole figure who could be counted on to accomplish these moves, Baron Diego D’Aguilar. In the coming months, Samuel would keep his father abreast of the Baron's activities. It was at D’Aguilar’s residence that the dozen or so Court Jews of Vienna would meet to discuss the evolving situation. D’Aguilar was the one who received correspondence from various councillors and princes and kept in touch with various communities. Here, I'll go back for a second. This is Maria Teresa on the right and a contemporary print showing the expulsion of the Jews from Prague.



Unfortunately, Samuel wrote, D’Aguilar was incapacitated throughout those months with a severe gout. I'm sorry that the Hogarth print is a little bit not so clear, but you can see the poor aristocrat with his left foot, raised upon the stool, suffering from gout.



So D'Aguilar could not even stand on his feet and had to be carried physically to the synagogue.

Gout, as an ailment, seemed to affirm one's aristocratic standing. It also tormented the great Samson Wertheimer. At times, the pain was such that he simply could not receive anyone. But when he did recover somewhat, he managed an audience with the Grand Duke, the Queen's consort, and again later with, I quote, *"A great Prince close to the Queen who intended him as intercedent person on behalf of our people."* unquote.

Wertheimer correspondence only hints at D'Aguilar's undertakings. Before we turn to these activities, we must ask, why was the Jewish Baron the obvious first choice of Wolf Wertheimer? The short answer is D'Aguilar's track record. Prague in 1744 was not the first time that Maria Teresa had resolved to expel her Jewish subjects, as we shall see. In 1742, two years earlier, Moravia, within spitting distance of Vienna, had been overrun by enemies. Recovering the territory, she was determined, the Queen was determined, even in the very midst of ongoing hostilities, to punish the Jews and banish them from the province. Jewish chronicles celebrated the mysterious D'Aguilar, who succeeded in thwarting the Queen's ruthless decree. It was this impressive ability to deflect an existential threat, which must have prompted Wertheimer and others to turn at once to D'Aguilar for a succour.

D'Aguilar was unique in several respects. For one, until the end of the 18th century, he was the only Jew to bear a noble title, aside from the Barons Lopes Suazo, and unlike them, he did not inherit a title from their grandfather, which their grandfather had first earned, but rather was ennobled on his own merit for services rendered to the Emperor. Perhaps the fact that he was of Iberian origin also contributed to the willingness of the

Emperor, who still styled himself King of Spain to ennoble him on such short notice, deliberately ignoring the fact that D'Aguilar was a Jew, something D'Aguilar had made no effort to hide. True, he was seldom accorded this title or addressed with an appropriate honorific by various bureaucrats, but occasionally he was. And unlike other Court Jews, he did not pay a tax for residing in Vienna. And when the state demanded a subsidy, he was recorded among the nobles of the realm, assessed a sum considerably higher than the Court Jews who were clustered separately at the end of the list. Second, during the early modern period, less than a handful of Court Jews could be also called State Jews, that is, serving in the State apparatus, as became much more common in the 19th century.

Typically, during the 17th and 18th centuries, European states were usually too weak to administer many aspects of their economies, and tended to contract them out to entrepreneurs. As a typical Court Jew, D'Aguilar's economic activities encompass three main spheres, each creating a different set of connections.

1. First, he leases the monopoly of tobacco of Austria, and this was his primary focus.
2. Second, he was also engaged in other state contracts, often partnering with other court Jews.
3. And third, banking. It was this share of activity that created a unique opportunity to become not only a Court Jew, but also to serve as a state Jew.

He was appointed Cahier of the Italian and Netherlands Council, serving as Paymaster in these two disparate Habsburg possessions encompassing Northern Italy and today's Belgium. As a banker with far-flung connections, D'Aguilar was a natural for the post, but a decisive factor in his receiving this appointment was no doubt yet another Iberian association, namely the patronage of a prominent Portuguese personality at the Viennese court, Count Emmanuel Silva Tarouca. The Count stood at the head of this dual council and significantly also served as mentor to the young Maria Teresa. His father had been Portuguese ambassador to the Netherlands before he was ambassador in Vienna, and his over-familiarity with Jews, raised rumours that he was secretly one.

The two also cooperated in building the Schönbrunn Palace. Silva Tarouca was in charge of the project, and D'Aguilar helped finance the cost. We can be sure that his ties with Tarouca played an important role in the Queen becoming familiar with it and appreciative of D'Aguilar's financial activities, even though Ludwig August Frankl's claim that, he was always allowed to enter the Queen's presence unannounced, is as fanciful as Frankl's later assertion that the Queen never received Jews face to face, but only behind a paravent, a divider.

The Portuguese connection was further cemented with the arrival of Sebastiau Jose de Carvalho e Melo as the new ambassador of Portugal in 1746. Although the future Marquis of Pombal, famous statesman, harboured typical anti-Jewish prejudiced, he seemed to overcome them in his encounters with D'Aguilar, inviting him and his wife,

the Baroness, to festive Christmas dinners at his embassy, where they rubbed shoulders with high aristocrats, diplomats, and military men. That all three men who are almost the same age might also have played a role in what can only be described as a circle of friends. To hold his own in this aristocratic milieu, we can only speculate that he was endowed with an interesting, even strong personality and also a measure of charm.

He entertained lavishly on a daily basis. With rabbis at the banquet, we can be certain the meals were actually kosher, with one traveller reporting, quote, *"He had the leading lords of Vienna at his table, as well as the ministers and ambassadors of the other powers"*, unquote.

There was a third aspect of Aguilar's exceptional position. Among the Court Jews of Vienna, he was at the time of the expulsion from Prague, the sole Portuguese Jew among Ashkenazim. Remarkably, at a time when mutual distrust, even phobias, reigned between the two Jewish communities in both Amsterdam and London, D'Aguilar was not only sought out as a partner for various economic ventures, but also formed deep friendships, especially with the scions of two long established Ashkenazi Viennese Court Jewish families, the Sintsheimers and the Schlesingers. They honoured him as godfather of their children, and he in turn did the same. A measure of trust these Ashkenazi businessmen had in the Portuguese D'Aguilar can be gauged by the fact that Sintsheimer, in his will, entrusted him with a chest of his possessions, and Schlesinger requested in his testament that the Baron, as godfather of his underage son, support him financially and assume responsibility that he be raised in the ways of the Lord.

This is quite a remarkable testimony to the faith placed in the baron's commitment to Judaism, for Schlesinger had a reputation as a very learned Kabbalist, and Talmudic scholar. Alongside the Moravian chief rabbi Escalus, these men were also Shtadlanin and patrons, as their monumental gravestones testify, and D'Aguilar could count on their connections as well in time of need. He also reciprocated these Ashkenazi affections. Strikingly, he employed the term Our Nation several times in his correspondence respondents referring to the plight of Prague Jewry. This was an extraordinary statement, evidence that his sense of Jewish collectively had significantly expanded at the time when Portuguese Jews deliberately excluded Ashkenazim from the circle of, quote, unquote, *"our nation"*. To be sure, D'Aguilar's, outsider status in Vienna was not necessarily an undesirable asset. After all, the parallels to his namesake, the biblical Moses, an aristocrat, raised in alien surroundings who returns to his people to redeem them, were not lost on the broad Jewish community. He had been immersed in the culture and religion of another world. And in his peregrinations, abandoning his native Portugal for Amsterdam, then London, and now Vienna, he had become a polyglot who commanded Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, English, Dutch, French, and German, as well as enough Hebrew to read the prayers and say the blessings when called upon, the weekly Torah readings at the so-called Turkish Synagogue that he founded. Perhaps he also communicated with his fellow Court Jews in a Germanified Yiddish. It was during the decade and a half he spent in Western Europe that he forged the bonds that would become essential to his role as a Shtadlan. He would be able to call upon an unparalleled network of relatives, friends, and acquaintances, and

business partners in both Western and Eastern Sephardi world, a web that spanned half the globe from the Caribbean to India.

A brief biography of Diego D'Aguilar is therefore in order.

Thanks to the Inquisition, if one is permitted to say this, the files of his grandfather, Francisco Lopes Pereira, provide information that enables us to trace the family back to the end of the century. Both sides of Francisco's family came from small towns in the Tras-os-Montes region in the northeast of Portugal, near the Spanish border. The history of the family echoed the general rhythms of New Christians on the peninsula, their persecution, their migratory and settlement patterns, their occupational preferences. Like many Spanish Jews in 1492, they, too, probably fled to Portugal, to towns just across the border.

These small towns with their sizable new Christian populations, unfortunately, figured large in the annals of the Inquisition in both Portugal and Spain. When in 1652, the 35-year-old Francisco was condemned by the Portuguese Inquisition at Coimbra, his Auto da Fe was but one more instance in the growing wave of persecutions of new Christians since 1640, when Portugal regained its independence from Spain.

Francisco fled to what he thought was the more liberal climate of Spain, only to be greeted with a sudden upswing in the Spanish Inquisition's activities. He faced trial in 1658, once again in 1670, this time accompanied by his wife and son, the 23-year-old Manuel Lopes-Pereira, Diego's father. Both times, punishments of varying severity were meted out for Judaizing. But the heaviest blow to the family came 12 years later. Gaspar, the oldest son of Francisco and the older brother of Manuel, the uncle of Diego, who had returned to Portugal a few years earlier, was seized by the Inquisition and burned alive as an unrepentant judiaizer at the Lisbon, Auto da Fe in 1682.

Francisco's younger son, Manuel de Aguilar, as he now styles himself, also returned to Portugal till the end of the century. If we can trust the evidence of the lists of the Portuguese Auto da Fe, we can conclude that neither Manuel nor his young son, Diego, had further to do with the Inquisition.

Only with the renewed persecution in Portugal in the second and third decade of the 18th century, did a new wave of immigrants began once more to reach Western Sephardi communities, among them this time Diego D'Aguilar, as he styled himself in the Spanish mode, his family, and quite a number of cousins.

From this long litany of woes of the Lopes Pereira, even sceptics would conclude that this was one genuinely judaizing family, although what precisely they practiced and believed is not known to us.

The question that arises is, if so, why did they not leave the peninsula with earlier waves of emigration, as many did in middle decades of the 17th century? The answer lies, I think, with the particular economic niche the family came to occupy, namely tobacco leasing. Here, once again, the family was typical of more general New Christian patterns

in its choice of occupational endeavour. The tobacco monopoly was first introduced in Castilla and Portugal in the 1630s, and from its very inception, the presence of New Christians was immediately felt at every level of the branch, from the administrator general of the lease at the very top, to the numerous subcontractors, down to the estancieros who sold tobacco at street corners.

It was the one economic niche which the New Christians continued to dominate long after the onset of their economic decline in middle of the 17th century. It may be that attachment to this niche prolonged the stay of the family in Iberia. Within a year of fleeing Portugal, Francisco had contracted the tobacco lease of Granada for a hefty sum and this was just one of many government contracts and asientos which were farmed out by the state. Following Francisco, his extended family abandoned their hometown of Mogadouro, and within years, we find them in the tobacco trade all along the cities of Andalusia. They must have enjoyed economic success for in 1677, father and son, Francisco, and Manuel, in partnership, contracted the tobacco lease for the entire Kingdom of Castile for seven years. This placed Francisco near the apex of the economic community, certainly firmly in the second tier. There were among the last New Christians to lease this asiento. The state now reformed the system, and when it once again offered the lease to private contractors at the beginning of the 18th century, new Christians were explicitly excluded from partaking in it.

Francisco passed away toward the end of the 17th century, and Manuel moved back to Portugal.

He, too, seems to have been well off for in 1710, he became the general administrator of the tobacco monopoly of the entire Portuguese Kingdom for three years. To the end of the lease, Manuel fell ill and died, and Diego, in his late teens, took over the business obligations. Around 1733, that is around 20 years later, after Diego, his mother, two sisters, and a bevy of cousins had fled Portugal and spent almost a decade and a half in London, he arrived in Vienna to lease the administration of the state tobacco monopoly. At first, he employed Christian frontmen. Later, he emerged from the background and openly contracted the tobacco until 1747.

General Lease of Tobacco [text from lecture slide]

- Castile Francisco Lopes Pereira 1677-79, 1683-84
Don Manuel de Aguilar 1677-79, 1683-84
- Portugal Don Manoel de Aguilar 1710-12
Diogo de Aguilar 1712-15
- Austria baron Diego D'Aguilar -1747
An Ashkenazi consortium led by Israel Honig 1760s -

What we see here is a remarkable continuity in the history of a new economic branch that became identifiably Jewish, occupied first by Iberian New Christians, then Sephardi new Jews, and finally by Central European Ashkenazim from the 1760s on. The Asiento system of the 17th century, Spain and Portugal, created the opportunities for New Christians that are a lot in common with those accorded Court Jews by the weak state

apparatus in Central Europe. Diego D'Aguilar was the rare living link between these two worlds.

As noted, sometime before 1718, he surfaced with his mother and two sisters, first in Amsterdam than London. The weddings of the two sisters soon thereafter, and then his own, was to provide the foundation for strong family and business ties, as well as the basis for firm standing within the establishment of the Portuguese communities in London and Amsterdam.

1726 was Diego's Annus Mirabilis. He was now ennobled as a baron of the Holy Roman Empire. And later that year, he espoused Simcha, a marriage that was to produce, over the three decades, 14 children that survived into adulthood. She belonged to one of Amsterdam's leading families, the De Fonseca. The Hebrew poet and chronicle of Amsterdam's Portuguese Jewish community, David Franco Mendes, was a first cousin. In coming years, his brothers-in-law, Abraham De Fonseca, also moved to London. Besides Diego and his brothers-in-law, a number of cousins also joined them as part of the last wave of New Christians to flee the Portuguese Inquisition. To gauge the strength of D'Aguilar's ties with the London Sephardi establishment, one need only to know that in the annual elections to the London Mahmoud, the executive board of the Portuguese Jewish communities, Diego's three brothers-in-law were chosen at least 20 times during the 40 years between 1720 and 1760 to serve on the five-man board.

In Amsterdam, he could not bow such preponderance of family ties among the community elites as in London, but his ties to the Fonseca family ensured that he had the ear of the Amsterdam communal establishment as well. The Amsterdam Mahmoud, explicitly referred to these ties in 1745, sang his praises, extolling D'Aguilar as an example a exemplar of bom-judaismo, for the key role he played in the intercession.

Throughout 1745, he corresponded with Western Sephardi communities in order to raise funds for the hard-pressed exiles of Prague. Money collected in London, Amsterdam, Livorno, and other cities were sent to him to dispose as he saw fit. His banking activities also enabled him to build a network of social connections with important foreign diplomats because he also served as bankers, private banker to Sir Thomas Robinson and Baron Barthold Burmania, the English and Dutch ambassadors who went on to play such an important role in 1745 when they conveyed urgent missives from the maritime powers to the much annoyed Maria Teresa. Both ambassadors were regular guests at D'Aguilar's table. It was also through D'Aguilar that the ambassador Burmania, for instance, communicated with the Amsterdam Portuguese community. The Vatican ambassador in Vienna was one more diplomat with whom D'Aguilar was in contact.

D'Aguilar successfully lobbied the Papal Nuncio to request the Holy See to intercede on behalf of Prague's Jewry. While the Pope himself did not respond, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Gonzaga did, but to no effect. However, Nuncio Paolucci's letter to Gonzaga is remarkable, not only for the humanitarian sentiments he expressed, but also that it conveyed important historical information, reviewing how previous measures by the Queen to expel Moravian Jewry in 1742 were thwarted. Recall that D'Aguilar was

celebrated in chronicles for having successfully prevented the move. This is what the Nuncio now writes, and I quote,

“I have been given a letter by Baron D’Aguilar, Jew and the lessee of tobacco in the domain of Her Majesty, the Queen. That miserable people is really worthy of pity. They had to abandon their houses built entirely by the nation itself, to which they have been confined and suffered in the same city over a thousand years. Many Catholic and non-Catholic princes attempted to dissuade Her Majesty from the decision that was taken, as far as I can understand, by the Majesty at the time she went to Prague for her coronation two years ago.”

That is how we know that it was taking place already before, two years earlier.

“What surprises most however, is that the greatest part of Bohemian nobility supported suspending the decree issued by Her Majesty, but it was not satisfied. However, the Moravian nobility is pleased to find the means to calm down Her Majesty's attitude by demonstrating to her the great disadvantage that would derive from each one of the lords who gave them hospitality in their futile lands and dominions if they would leave. They would lose more than half of their income and profits they earned from the Jews.”

This is the letter of the Nuncio. Thus, we learned that Maria Teresa had planned to expel the Jews of her kingdom already two years earlier. And already then, the aristocracy risen to protest. But while the nobles of Bohemia had failed to dissuade the Queen, their counterparts in Moravia were more successful. And here the difference between the two provinces should be noted. Jews in Bohemia were concentrated in Prague, a free royal city, or they were scattered in small numbers in villages around the countryside. There were few market towns owned by the great magnets where Jews resided. In Moravia, by contrast, Jews were barred from cities and villages, and were almost all concentrated in market towns owned by the high aristocrats.

Two aristocrats with extensive holdings in Moravia are linked to this successful lobbying. Liechtenstein and Dittrestein, almost echoing a Tom Stuppard play.

A Hebrew chronicle written a few decades later, heaps fulsome praise on Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein, described as D’Aguilar’s long-time friend, bosom friend even, ever since their days of youth in Iberia. Prince Liechtenstein, the largest landowner in Moravia, had served as ambassador to Paris and Prussia, and in 1745, he had been appointed field marshal. Here, the evidence is anecdotal, but probably his advocacy holds a kernel of truth. The second aristocrat's role is much better documented. In a letter to Wertheimer, a Viennese Jewish intercessor confirmed the Nuncio’s assessment, quote,

“A few years ago, the Moravian lords headed by Count Leopold von Dietrichstein caused the cessation of the expulsion” unquote.

Dietrichstein's key role is further corroborated by David Franco Mendès, the first cousin of Dagenard's wife, who carried on a correspondence with D'Aguilar during 1745. Writing in his Chronicle, of the Amsterdam Community, he drew upon these letters, and he wrote, *"The Baron made the most lively intercession with all the nobles and ambassadors, and even with the Pope's Nuncio."*

On May 19th, Count Dietrichstein, who held him in high esteem, informed him that the Queen had resolved to allow Jews to remain in Moravia and even Bohemia. Dietrichstein owned several market towns with large Jewish communities. Chief among them, Nickelsburg, the chief community in Moravia. But Count Leopold Philipp Maria von Ritterstein also served as chief treasurer of Bohemia during those days. And it was the Bohemian treasury that repeatedly opposed the treasures that the Bohemian Chancellor, Count Kinski, Haman, in popular Jewish discourse, sought to introduce to limit the Jewish population by expelling all but the wealthiest.

Having seen D'Aguilar's involvement in entreating the Vatican to intercede, I will now conclude by addressing our original question about the veracity of his role in the Ottoman Sultan's intervention. While other than legends, we have no concrete indication that D'Aguilar himself was in fact in contact with Ottoman Jews during the Prague expulsions. However, strong circumstantial evidence would support the possibility. As a banker, he was deeply involved in collecting and transferring funds raised in Europe to communities in Palestine via Constantinople-based community, Vat Kushta. And we do know that Constantinople bankers, indeed, proved successful in interceding with the Sultan.

The momentary constellation in 1745 of persons favourable to Jews at the highest level of the Ottoman court was crucial. The Sultan generally left affairs in the hands of the Grand Vizier. The Reis Affendi, who served as foreign minister, was an intellectual who spent time in the Ottoman Embassy in Vienna, had been repeatedly engaged in negotiations with the Hapsburgs. He was also known to be corrupt, a hedonist, and could easily be bought.

The most influential Jews at the Ottoman Court had been medical doctors and bankers. The key person at the time was David Zonana, who had been banker to the chief of the Janissary Corps. When the latter was promoted to Grand Vizier, Zonana's influence as his favourite waxed even more. Moreover, he also enjoyed the patronage of the most influential figure at the court, the octogenarian, Besheer, the chief of the Black Eunuchs, who had raised and toppled most of the preceding Grand Viseers.

And as the Reis Affendi later confided, it was the Jews themselves who dictated the letter he wrote on behalf of the illiterate Grand Vizier, urging Maria Teresa to exercise compassion and mercy. And indeed, a British attaché, stationed in Constantinople, reported in London, and I quote,

"The Austrian Minister has at least made no secret at the dispatch made by him at the Porte's instance, a favor of a large body of nearly 30,000 Jews established in Bohemia, but chiefly in Prague, whom the Queen, resenting their behaviour

with regard to King of Russia, has resolved to banish out of her kingdom. But they found means to interest the Porte in their cause by means of the intercession of some of their brethren who are in a degree of credit and authority here, scarce to believe are not to be paralleled in any other part of the world, for they have found the art of making themselves so necessary to the Turks that the greatest men of the court have a most extraordinary complacency for them."

While D'Aguilar's role in the Ottoman intercession rests largely on legend, nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Jews could indeed exercise quite an impressive measure of political power, affirming Israel Landa's interpretation of the blessing of Jacob.

Was the intercession of Jewish notables, and D'Aguilar in particular, effective? The close to 10,000 Jews who were banished from Prague soon after Maria Teresa ordered their expulsion, and they returned to the city only three years later. In the short term, no one, not the Sultan, not the Pope, nor her husband or mother, no one was able to persuade the Queen to revoke her decree. But a few weeks, as we have seen, after her initial decree, she also ordered the wholesale exit of Bohemian and Moravian Jewry. Here, the interventions were more successful. The tactic was to ask her to delay the execution until the Queen gave up the idea of expelling Bohemian and Moravian Jewry.

And finally, as my teacher, Baruch Mevorach, argued, one of the great scholars who explored this episode: this episode triggered a greater sense of esprit de corps, [it] laid the foundations of an infrastructure of transnational solidarity, and an exercise of Jewish political power that was to grow in the 19th and 20th century, culminating in the Alliance israélite universelle³, among others; and among others, the Zionist movement; and finally, the State of Israel, when indeed, one can affirm, *Lo Yasur Shevet me Yehuda*, the sceptre shall not depart from Judah.

Thank you.

Host

Thank you, Michael. Thank you very much for your presentation. We have roughly 10 minutes for discussion and comments. And the questions in the chat revolve around the relationship between the Ashkenazi Jews who were expelled and other Sephardi Jews who were involved in supporting them. So, the first question is about the presence of Sephardi Jews in Vienna around the time of the expulsion: could you give us a rough figure.

Michael Silber

Diego D'Aguilar, among other things, founded what came to be called the Turkish Synagogue, sometime around the 1730s. We're not quite sure which date. Certainly by 1735, there was a synagogue for Sephardi Jews. Because of treaties between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, the Sephardi Jews from the Ottoman Empire could come

³ This is a Paris-based international Jewish organization founded in 1860 with the purpose of safeguarding human rights for Jews around the world.

to Vienna, and they were not burdened by the type of discriminatory laws that Ashkenazi Jews suffered.

So, you had a small community of Turkish merchants who had started coming to Vienna, and they went to the synagogue, which had been founded by D'Aguilar, but along the Portuguese rite . But nevertheless, they became part of what was called the Turkish Synagogue. The Turkish Synagogue, apparently, has still prayers that still echo much more the Portuguese Amsterdam rite rather than the Sephardi Oriental rite, as I learned from Edward Serussi, the big expert on the field. And to some extent, because of this story of Frankl, when the history of the Sephardi community, the Turkish community, was written in the late 19th century, and D'Aguilar was seen as a key figure. To a large extent, the historical record was dominated by this connection. So D'Aguilar is known in the historiographic record much more as being someone linked to this Eastern Sephardi world.

But as we have seen, actually, he was much more involved also with the Western Sephardi. And he communicated with Western Sephardi communities all throughout. Like I said, the London Mahmud was almost dominated by his brothers-in-law, his son-in-law afterwards, and his cousins, who all came roughly in the 1720s, 1730s to London. But also in Amsterdam, because of his ties with the Fonseca family, so he had very close ties over there. And further, because of these ties, there were also ties to the Caribbean among D'Aguilar's descendants, especially the Baruch Lousada family. But also, some of the D'Aguilar ended up in Jamaica, where they made their fortune, and then they came back to London often. But there were also ties to Suriname, where Simcha de Fonseca's grandmother was Rachael de la Perra. So, they had over there this worldwide connections.

On top of that, one of his brothers-in-law⁴, his grandfather had been born in Nevis in the Caribbean. He was one of the founders of the London Jewish community in the 1670s. And then he ended up in India, where he went into the diamond trade, came back to London, and he was actually a mentor for the young D'Aguilar, who then had one of his sisters marry his grandson. And that grandson is buried in Vienna. But that grandson had a son who was D'Aguilar's nephew, who then became D'Aguilar's son-in-law. And that son-in-law was one of the members who were on the founding of the British Board of Deputies in 1760.

He corresponded with Livorno in Italy. He corresponded with Mantua all over the place. And as I said, he was instrumental in passing money on to Vat Kushta, the Constantinople committee that passed on the funds to Palestine Jewry. He was known by everyone. There were people from Persia who wrote at that time, the Khakham Khida, Khayim Azoulay, also received a recommendation from him when he came through. Everyone knew him. He became a very well-known figure in its lifetime.

Host

⁴ To follow up: as far as I know Diego had three brothers-in-law: Jacob Alvarez married to Esther; Gabriel Lima married to Rafael; and, Jacob Dias Fernan married to Sarah. I suspect the brother-in-law being referred to is Gabriel Lima – will email Silber to ask for clarity.

So how would you describe his interaction with the Ashkenazi Court Jews in Vienna at his time?

Michael Silber

As I said, there was always a lot of tension between, especially the Portuguese Jews and Ashkenazi Jews. Portuguese Jews drew a barrier at the end of the synagogue, which said, Slaves and Ashkenazi can stay over here, but no more. If a Portuguese woman would marry an Ashkenazi, she was kicked out of the community. And this one, even later on, even a Portuguese male who would marry an Ashkenazi woman would be kicked out in Amsterdam community. So there was this sense of superiority. And I guess I think Ashkanazim pretty much also internalized this, because this became also part of what was called the Sephardi mystique, certainly in the 19th century. But even before that, someone like Naftali Hertz-Weisel, who was a very famous Maschil, along with Moses Mendelssohn, he was a Sephardi wannabe. He was a Sephardi want to be. He made himself out to be a Sephardi, and then he ended up buried in this Sephardi part of the cemetery in Altona, Hamburg, this type of thing. So you had this type of situation. What is striking is that when D'Aguilar comes to Vienna, I'm sure that there was this look upon him as a, I don't want to say superior figure, but very much esteemed.

What is striking is that he was very quickly on, he both partnered economically with the key Court Jews, but also, they exchanged God sons. He was the sandak of the Viennese court Jews, and they in turn were the godfathers of his own son. And the very notion that he says 'Our Nation' when he was talking about the plight of the Prague Jewry, it's very striking. Nation was in the Portuguese Jewish world was meant Portuguese Jewish community. That was it. There was the Ashkenazi Nation, and it was the Portuguese nation. It was the Portuguese nation. So, the use of this idea of our nation, it shows an expansion of things. On the other hand, one of the reasons that he returned to London was because he was looking for a Yoham, he was looking for a matchmaking for his 14 kids, and he didn't want them to marry Ashkenazi.

Host

I mentioned earlier that I consider you one of the most erudite scholars of Central European history. I think everyone on the call now understands why I'm saying that, because there are very few people, let's face it, who have this prosopographic insights you have, Michael. It's very impressive. I have one question about another work, which struck me as extremely important just roughly 25 years later in the context of a ritual murder accusation in Poland, namely free masons..... are you aware of [any connection between the D'Aguilars and Free Masonry] in this context?

Michael Silber

Yes, absolutely. My mentor, Jacob Katz, was almost a pioneer in this field where he wrote a book on Freemasons, and Jews. But then he was criticized by an Anglo-Jewish historian that he had overlooked the English connection, and he had listed a long number of English free masons. And in fact, yes, the D'Aguilar's were members of the English free masons. At least the two D'Aguilar's, so you had that. They also subscribed to Handel. We know what happened to the D'Aguilar family is remarkable. The first generation of his children still remained Jewish, but of the second generation a large

number began to intermarry with prominent non-Jewish figures. Ephraim, who was the second baron, and he was well known for this caricature, Starvation Farm, because at one point, he became very much of an eccentric, and he had a farm where there were starving cows, and this was very well known at the time. His daughter, he married fantastically. That is when D'Aguilar comes to London, I must say, he must have seduced, I can't think of anything else, one of the Mendes Da Costa heiresses with an enormous dowry. And when she had two daughters.

And when she died, his first wife, he married him once again fantastically with another member of that family. So he was enormously wealthy, but he lost a lot of his money in the American colonies. And as a result, he became an eccentric, and he became known for that. He's also known in legal history in England as having set a precedent for wife abuse. So D'Aguilar versus D'Aguilar is... Oh, yeah. I don't know if it's his day, decided, but he was that way. But his two daughters married into the English aristocracy. One was to an admiral who was, I think, a governor general of Ceylon at one point, and an admiral. I think in the Scottish Highlands, I know that they are descendants of D'Aguilar. But elsewhere also, many of the, especially second and third generation became military men after they converted. First in India, and then I said, You have several generals in in that dynasty who are D'Aguilar's, and you have even more where the D'Aguilar is subsumed as a middle name because now they're only descendants of that. Also military, you have governors, you have high officials. They became really tied with the British Empire.

Host

There's a recent PhD at King's about the D'Aguilar cases in the context of Sephardi jurisdiction by Wendy Filer, which will hopefully soon be published as a as a monograph.

Michael Silber

Very much. Please contact me. I don't know if you have my email, but you can find my email It's michael.Silber@huji.ac.il H-U-J-I, which is Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel. Ac, which is Academic IL. Anyone who has any information, any questions, please write me.

Host

Yes, we are very happy to transfer any email messages to Michael and Beck. Okay. I thank you very much, Michael, for stunning talk, extremely rich. As you can see, there is a lot of enthusiasm.

Michael Silber

Thank you.