

Friendship in the Revolution: A Sephardic Correspondence (1794-1799)

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The picture of daily life in Bordeaux which emerges from historiography of the French Revolution tells of chaos, fear and uncertainty, of economic ruin and political disaster. It rarely speaks of friendship between “ordinary” people or even, by 1794 at least, of enthusiasm for the Revolution itself. Yet as the Bordeaux economy foundered and its mercantile community staggered from crisis to crisis, a series of letters between three Sephardic *négociants* of the city yields a more nuanced account, replete with the enduring comfort of friendship and gratitude for the events which had given them full citizenship. This correspondence, between people who, while not without significance within their own milieu, were not leaders in any phase of the Revolution and remain otherwise unknown to us, contributes another dimension to the narrative of revolutionary Bordeaux. The letters contribute equally to an understanding of the history of friendship itself, of expressions of intimacy and the emotions of affection and love thus generated.

The economic catastrophe inflicted on Bordeaux was real enough, however. The British blockade in 1793 had completely severed the mercantile community’s transatlantic links. In February the following year the Convention’s emancipation of the black slaves of Saint-Domingue exposed Bordeaux’s economic dependence on the slave trade and on the major lucrative crops of sugar and coffee. The *bordelais* business community was under political threat as well, the majority having supported the moderate Girondins in a Federalist revolt against the radical Paris commune during the summer of 1793. More than 200 *négociants* had later been arraigned before the Jacobin *Commission militaire* under the terms of the “*mesure de sûreté générale concernant les négociants.*”¹

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Considered a “class of grasping men,” the Convention’s *envoi en mission*, Garnier de Saintes, described them as more cold than the gold they handled, seeing the tears of the people without being moved.² Robespierre’s observer, Marc-Antoine Jullien, agreed, writing to Saint-Just on 25 Prairial an II [June 13, 1794]: “Bordeaux is a centre of *négociantisme* and of egoism” (Bordeaux est un foyer de *négociantisme* et d’*égoïsme*).³ This judgment may not of course have been entirely inaccurate.

Within Bordeaux’s commercial world figured hundreds of Sephardim, all of whom escaped the guillotine but who, nevertheless, were considered fair game for considerable fines, by far the largest of which was 1,200,000 *livres* levied against the banker Charles Peixotto and the five Raba frères, all *négociants*, who collectively paid out half a million. Indeed, nearly thirty per cent of all the fines handed down by the *Commission militaire* were levied against the Sephardim who at that time made up only a small fraction of bordelais *négociants*.⁴ “L’*égoïsme*” was the charge most frequently cited.⁵

Before the Revolution, about 2000 Jews lived in Bordeaux at the king’s pleasure, regulated by constraints and limited to commercial activities in their choice of occupation.⁶ They were, however, comparatively well off, having secured over the course of two hundred years certain rights and privileges through letters patent. In 1776, the letters patent required that the Sephardim be treated as any other of Louis XVI’s subjects, permitting them to live and work where they chose: rights and privileges far more generous than those applying to any other Jews or indeed to most Protestants in France at that time.⁷ They had thus achieved a *modus operandi* with Catholic Bordeaux

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¹ Philippe Gardey, *Négociants et marchands de Bordeaux: De la guerre d’Amérique à la Restauration (1780-1830)* (Paris, 2009), 195, 203. In this context, Alan Forrest’s *Society and Politics in Revolutionary Bordeaux* (London, 1975) is essential reading. More recently, Stephen Auerbach has written of the chaos and violence which beset Bordeaux after 1793 and has analyzed the political culture which underlay the turbulence. See his “Politics, Protest, and Violence in Revolutionary Bordeaux, 1789-1794,” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 37 (2009), <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0037.010>> (accessed March 14, 2011).

² Gardey, *Négociants et marchands*, 205, quoting Garnier de Saintes in Théophile Malvezin, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux depuis les origines jusqu’à nos jours* (Bordeaux, 1892), t.3, 296.

³ *Ibid.*, Jullien to Saint-Just, 25 Prairial an II [June 18, 1794]. Gardey is quoting Archives départementales de la Gironde (hereafter ADG), 8J 706, Fonds Bigot, “Lettre de Jullien à Saint-Just.” Gardey has a good account of the interpretation of Jacobin rhetoric, for which there is no ready translation of the two words here. “*Égoïsme*,” for example, was a blanket accusation levied against those whose economic crimes were unable to be more precisely defined. *Ibid.*, 194-203.

⁴ About 4 per cent, according to M. Aurélien Vivie, *Histoire de la Terreur à Bordeaux* (Bordeaux, 1877), t. 2, 403-405. Based on Vivie’s statistics a total of 6,940,300 francs in fines was gathered in Bordeaux by the *Commission militaire*, the Sephardim contributing approximately 1,940,000 francs. *Négociants* altogether paid out 69 per cent of fines imposed by the *Commission*. See Gardey, *Négociants et marchands*, 168, where the number of Jewish *sociétés de négoce* is put at thirty-four. See also *ibid.*, “Graphique 23: La terreur économique à Bordeaux: Les amendes infligées par la Commission militaire,” 213.

⁵ According to Gardey, *Négociants et marchands*, 213.

⁶ Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley, 2003), 26-30.

⁷ Frances Malino, *The Sephardic Jews of Bordeaux: Assimilation and Emancipation in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France* (Tuscaloosa, 1978), 26. The letters patent are contained in the book of documents

mercantile society which valued their commercial capabilities, their community cohesion, and the trade networks on which they were able to draw.⁸

From the outset Bordeaux's Sephardim had welcomed the Revolution for the freedom and equality it promised. And despite the prolonged and sometimes hostile debates concerning their readiness for full citizenship aired in the National Assembly over 1789, their support for the Revolution seemed to have been justified when the decree of emancipation was promulgated by Louis XVI on January 28, 1790.⁹ While by 1794 the circumstances were dangerous for a number of Jews, many of whom were known Girondin sympathizers, there were others who considered themselves fortunate.¹⁰ A matter of weeks before Jullien delivered his poor opinion of Bordeaux's commercial community, on 2 Prairial an II [May 21, 1794], a young Jewish *négociant*, Isaac Rodrigues, wrote to his friend in the Armée des Pyrénées-Occidentales, stationed in Bayonne. Addressed "Au Républicain I de J Pereyre," he reflected on his friend's triumphant news of victories against the Spanish and

the coalition of despots, who so unjustly make war with us. In vain has brute force fleetingly given them a few advantages. They cannot compete with our glorious successes, and the only effect they produce on us is to reignite our courage to overcome them and our resolve to destroy them utterly. Thus the words of Robespierre's Report please me: "Let us be awe-inspiring in our reversals of fortune and unassuming in our successes [our triumphs]."¹¹

The first thing in the world is to serve one's country, wherever she calls us, he wrote.¹²

Isaac Rodrigues and his friend, Isaac Pereire, together with a third, Mardochee Lopès Fonseca, were permanent residents of Bordeaux at that time, well-respected members of the Jewish community, and all then described as *négociants*.¹³ The family

edited by Gérard Nahon, *Les "Nations" juives portugaises du sud-ouest de la France (1684-1791) Documents* (Paris, 1981), 21-48.

⁸ Helen Margaret Davies, "Jewish Identity, Social Justice and Capitalism: The Making of the Pereire Brothers" (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2005), 52-3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-8. See also ADG, C 4438 (liasse), "Repertoire contenant le nom de mm. les négociants-armateurs, assureurs, banquiers, & commissionnaires, convoqués à l'Assemblée qui doit avoir lieu le 2 mars 1789 dans l'hôtel de la bourse." Among the two hundred or so business leaders who gathered at the Bordeaux bourse to draw up instructions for their deputies to the Estates-General there were over a dozen "*Négociants Juifs*."

¹⁰ Zosa Szajkowski, "The Sephardic Jews during the Revolution of 1789," *Jews and the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848* (New York, 1970), 434-61.

¹¹ "... les despotes coalisés qui nous font si injustement la guerre. En vain le sort des armes leur offre t-il par temps quelques avantages. Ils ne peuvent entrer en comparaison avec nos glorieux succès, et le seul effet qu'ils produisent sur nous c'est de redoubler notre courage à les vaincre et notre persévérance à les détruire. Ainsi-aime-je bien ces paroles du Rapport de Robespierre. 'Soyons terribles dans les revers, et modestes dans les succès [nos triomphes].'" Robespierre spoke of "triumphes" and not of "succès." Archives de la famille Pereire, Boîte 7, "Famille Rodrigues et Fonseca," Rodrigues fils 'Au Républicain I. de J. Pereyre chez l'héritier de Ic. Levy à J.J. Rousseau [sic] Lez-Bayonne,' 23 Prairial an II [June 11, 1794]. Rodrigues consistently spelled his friend's name as "Pereyre" and not "Pereire."

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ They were thus described in civilian life. When he witnessed an *acte de naissance* on 15 Vendémiaire an IV [Oct., 7, 1795], however, Pereire was described rather surprisingly by his war service classification as

background of each was typical of the Jews of the south-west whose common origins could be traced to their expulsion from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492. Some Sephardim managed to escape to Portugal but even here the charge of *judaïsme*, of covert Judaism, which brought either forced conversion or death, forced many to flee again. Some found a clandestine return to Spain less threatening than a perilous existence in Portugal. Others also sought refuge in the comparative safety of Bordeaux and of Bayonne and its surrounding towns, and by the time of the Revolution the Jews of the south-west numbered some 4 500 people.¹⁴

Rodrigues' family had settled in Bordeaux from Spain early in the eighteenth century. His father, Benjamin Rodrigues Henriques, has been described variously as a negociant/farmer (*négociant/cultivateur*) and as a retail merchant (*marchand/détailliste*); likewise, his mother, Judith Mendès, was also from a Sephardic family resident in Bordeaux for the better part of the century.¹⁵ Isaac Pereire's father, Jacob Rodrigues Pereire, who had left Spain for Bordeaux in 1741, had been a renowned teacher of deaf mutes, reaching a position of eminence as representative of the Sephardic Jews of south-west France at the courts of Louis XV and Louis XVI. At fifty-one years of age he married Miriam Lopès Dias, thirty years his junior, who was of a well-to-do family from the other centre of Sephardic settlement in the south-west, St. Esprit-lès-Bayonne, now a suburb of Bayonne.¹⁶ Fonseca, whose family had sought refuge in St. Esprit from Portugal in the early years of the eighteenth century, had been a significant figure in Sephardic communal life which he represented on several occasions in external forums, moving to Bordeaux in 1788. He and his wife, Esther de Daniel Delvaille, a former resident of St. Esprit also, had a family of three daughters and a son.¹⁷

None of the three correspondents was related at the beginning, though they were to become so: Rodrigues married Fonseca's daughter, Sara-Sophie, in October 1794, and Pereire another daughter, Rebecca-Henriette, in 1800.

Between May 1794 and September 1799, they corresponded with one another, writing in French with scarcely a reference to Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), the historic language of the Sephardim, and none at all to Hebrew. The letters are not plentiful, on the order of thirty two.¹⁸ The series is incomplete, and it is unclear when it began, although this was most

“employé de la marine” when he was in fact in the army. See Paul Courteault, “Un Bordelais saint-simonien,” *Revue philomathique de Bordeaux et du sud-ouest* (1925): 155.

¹⁴ The figures are not exact, but in addition to the 2000 Sephardim in Bordeaux, in St. Esprit-lès-Bayonne and its surrounding towns (Bidache, Dax, Labastide-Clairence and Peyrehorade) there were approximately a further 2,500 Sephardim. See Esther Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 54.

¹⁵ Simon Altmann and Edouardo L Ortiz, eds., *Mathematics and Social Utopias in France: Olinde Rodrigues and His Times* (Providence, Rhode Island, 2005), 6-7. Descendants of the Rodrigues Henriques family have instituted an extensive web site which provides detailed genealogical information on the family. See <www.nebuleuse-rh.org>

¹⁶ She brought a dowry of ten thousand *livres* to the marriage. Ernest La Rochelle, *Jacob Rodrigues Pereire: Premier instituteur des sourds muets...sa vie et ses travaux* (Paris, 1882), 456.

¹⁷ For discussion of Fonseca and his career see Davies, *Jewish Identity, Social Justice and Capitalism*, 67-71. The full names carried at birth by Isaac Rodrigues Henriques and Isaac Rodrigues Pereire were abbreviated (just as I have done in this paper) at least from the time they became adults.

¹⁸ The series of 32 letters and several other business documents (the latter comprised official documents and five letters from other correspondents) form part of the Archives de la famille Pereire (hereafter AFP).

likely within six months of the date of the first letter in the collection.¹⁹ And there are only tantalising hints of an exchange, with Pereire meticulously noting the dates of each one of his replies. The letters thus need to be approached with some caution.²⁰

The focus of the correspondence was, in the main, on business.²¹ While there is some evidence that Pereire and Rodrigues may have been employed by one or other of the Bordeaux *maisons de négoce*, they did business together as well.²² Not that there was any legal contract binding them: indeed their association was voluntary, possibly based on a verbal expression of trust if even that was given or needed.²³ They also carried out their business in conjunction with other Sephardim from time to time. These letters and business dealings thus provide both a perspective and commentary on the Bordeaux economy during this period of the Revolution. Reminded by Mireille Bossis, however, that “for writer and recipient the letter is above all an extension of daily life,” they more importantly give us a rare glimpse of how some of France’s new citizens responded to the challenge of emancipation, of being both Frenchmen and Jews.²⁴

Precisely how these three men came to know each other is uncertain, but with the Sephardic community living within a narrowly defined area of Bordeaux in what one historian has described as a “voluntary ghetto,”²⁵ they could scarcely have avoided each other. Fonseca, at forty-four years of age when the first letter extant was written, was the oldest. By 1791 he was one of four Administrators of the *Société de bienfaisance* set up as a temporary measure to ease the Bordeaux Sephardic community through the difficult process of abandoning the *Mahamad*, the Sephardic council which had until then regulated their affairs. The paths of all three would certainly have crossed if not by then, certainly by the following year, when Rodrigues and Pereire, taking on community responsibilities at an early

¹⁹ AFP. The first extant letter is from Rodrigues to Pereire and dated 2 Prairial an II [May 21, 1794]. It refers to an earlier letter from Pereire dated 28 Floréal an II [May 17, 1794]. The last letter in the series was written by Fonseca, Paris to Pereire, Bordeaux, 24 Fructidor an VII [Sept., 10, 1799]. There is one final letter in the collection written four years later by Pereire, Bordeaux, to Rodrigues, Paris, in 1803.

²⁰ The business content of the letters is from time to time coded or words are abbreviated, presenting occasional difficulty in translation.

²¹ The letters were written at times when one or other was away from Bordeaux, either in Bayonne where Fonseca was located at the beginning of the correspondence, and where Pereire joined the *Armée des Pyrénées-Occidentales*; in Rochefort where Fonseca went in 1795 for reasons which are not clear but presumably related to business; in Toulouse where Pereire joined the staff of General Desnoyers early in 1796; or in Paris when Rodrigues moved there permanently late in 1796 and where Fonseca joined him temporarily in 1797 and 1799.

²² AFP, Fonseca, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 12 Prairial an V [May 31, 1797], where he wrote to Pereire: “tu sois cadet Baroine comme on disait à Bordx. [Bordeaux] que Rodrigot [familiar for Rodrigues] était cadet Fonfrède.” The significance of “Fonfrède” is noted later in the text. “Baroine” does not feature otherwise in any of the letters or documents although Fonseca did make reference to one, “Barroin,” in an earlier letter to Pereire of 3 Fructidor an II [Aug., 20, 1794], a letter which was written on his behalf by Rodrigues and may refer to the same person.

²³ There is no evidence of a formal agreement. Some years later it was said of Fonseca and Pereire that in entering a marine insurance business together the only contract existing between them was verbal. This may confirm that trust was the basis on which the three also operated. ADG, 3 E 24125, Mathieu notaire: Fonseca neveu inventaire.

²⁴ Mireille Bossis, “Methodological journeys through correspondences,” Special Issue, *Yale French Studies* 71 (1986): 64, 74.

²⁵ Jean Cavignac, *Les Israélites bordelais de 1780 à 1850: Autour de l’émancipation* (Paris, 1991), 15.

age (for they were both in their twenties in 1792), also became Administrators of the *Société*.²⁶

Since this was on the face of it a business correspondence I will first examine what the letters tell us about commercial activities and the economic conditions encountered and then explore some further aspects of the letters themselves.

The three experienced some ups and considerably more downs in their business activities, echoing the roller-coaster patterns of trade. At the beginning, making any money at all was problematic, and indeed in 1794 references to business are sparse. But in that year Fonseca was in St. Esprit, and whatever else he was doing there (which we shall come to) he was almost certainly also trading illegally in Spanish or Portuguese currencies – Bayonne is only thirty kilometres or so from the Spanish border. His colleague in the Bordeaux Section 19, Bon Accord (of which Fonseca was secretary), Salomon Lopès Dubec, had been under investigation by the Bordeaux *Comité de Surveillance* on suspicion of dealing in gold through Bayonne. While he was exonerated, Lopès Dubec later admitted his guilt in his autobiography.²⁷ In any case, veiled references in their letters confirm that Fonseca, Pereire and Rodrigues traded in *piastres* and *pistoles* throughout the period of their correspondence, though this traffic was by no means confined to the Sephardic community.²⁸

The Directory and its policies introduced greater economic stability than had existed under the Jacobins and even some economic growth, prompting James Livesey's characterisation of France during the period as the "Commercial Republic."²⁹ This expansion in business opportunities is apparent in the Sephardic letters. When, from early 1795, neutral shipping from the United States began to reinvigorate transatlantic trade with Bordeaux, the Sephardim were able to mix their illicit commerce with more legitimate activities, dealing in candles and cotton piece goods like *mouchoirs*.³⁰ At auction in Bordeaux, Fonseca purchased molasses and tobacco from Brazil on behalf of a

²⁶ Archives municipales de Bordeaux (hereafter AMB), GG 842-851, "Culte Israélite: Naissances, Mariages, Décès, 1706-1792," especially 71, 78, and 79 where each of the Administrators signed the page. Fonseca was appointed in May 1791 and Pereire and Rodrigues in April 1792. Whereas there is ample evidence that Isaac Rodrigues was 22 years of age at this time, Isaac Pereire's age is not so clear. According to the records of the Paroisse de Saint Eustache, Isaac was born on 9 February 1771. Records of the *Société* Pereire note his circumcision on 16 February 1771. I thank Mme Colette Pereire for this information. Engraved on the Pereire family grave in Montmartre cemetery, Paris, is a date of Isaac's birth as 1767 but in the light of the above this is clearly wrong.

²⁷ Jean Cavignac ed., "L'Autobiographie de Salomon Lopès-Dubec," *Archives Juives* 19 (1983): 15-16. The gold was acquired by Dubec's son who "fit alors un voyage à Bayonne où il employa une grande partie de ses assignats à l'achat de pièces d'or d'Espagne pour environ 8000 livres et revint à Bordeaux."

²⁸ For example see AFP, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, Bayonne, 6 Floréal an III [Apr., 25, 1795] in which he accounts for the purchase on Pereire's behalf of 7692 piastres; Rodrigues, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 26 Floréal an V; and Rodrigues, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 6 Prairial, an V. There are many references in the letters to currencies, guineas, pure gold [or fin], and gold bullion [lingots].

²⁹ James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

³⁰ Silvia Marzagalli, "Establishing Transatlantic Trade Networks in Time of War: Bordeaux and the United States, 1793-1815," *Business History Review* 79 (Winter 2005): 811-44. Marzagalli shows how rapidly the Bordeaux and American merchants re-established trade links after the fall of Robespierre.

Sephardic trader from Bayonne.³¹ They bought and sold sugar, coffee or cacao on the rare occasions when they could lay their hands on these commodities, otherwise more cotton goods of *toile* from Flanders and printed cotton *nankinettes*.³² They engaged in small-scale marine insurance.³³ They traded on the Hamburg bourse when the exchange in Paris was closed in 1793-94 and on the Paris bourse when it reopened in October 1795.³⁴ In none of these ventures were they notably successful, however, save perhaps for a deal on the Amsterdam bourse in which they shared 20,000 *livres* with one other.³⁵ It is not surprising, then, to find their letters expressing concerns about the state of the economy, lamenting the “degradation” in the value of the *assignat* and fluctuations in currency values on the various bourses – Paris, Hamburg, Amsterdam and London.³⁶

Late in 1796 Rodrigues received his *congé de réforme* (discharge from the army) from the Directory, and, having secured a position in Paris with the Bordeaux *armateur* (shipowner) and *fabricant* (manufacturer), François-Bertrand Boyer-Fonfrède, who also dealt in finance, he left permanently for the capital, in the vanguard of what was an exodus of young men and women from the provinces. From here Rodrigues continued to trade on behalf of the others.³⁷ But in 1799, the United States instituted an embargo on its ships entering Bordeaux and the suspension of diplomatic and economic ties with France, combined with the collapse of several commercial enterprises in the large entrepôt port of Hamburg, which had been essential to Bordeaux’s trade, returned Bordeaux to a state of crisis.³⁸

The correspondents attempted to remain philosophical in these challenging circumstances, reassuring each other they would do nothing rash. They likewise trimmed their expectations and ambitions. Prices changed from one moment to the next, and by a great margin, wrote Rodrigues to Pereire:

If I happen to take on some business I want it to be for a short term. ... Buying and selling are the only things I want to do in my position. I cannot conduct myself differently without compromising my tranquillity. Ambition will never have a hold over me at the expense of honour.³⁹

³¹ AFP, formal agreement signed by Fonseca to sell goods to Louis Nounès in Bayonne, 20 Frimaire, an IV [Dec., 11, 1795].

³² *Ibid.*, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, Bayonne, 6 Floréal an III [Apr., 25, 1795] and 2 Floréal an IV [Apr., 21, 1796].

³³ *Ibid.*, Fonseca, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 12 Prairial an V [May, 31, 1797].

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Pereire, Bordeaux, to Fonseca, Rochefort, 27 Frimaire, an IV [Dec., 18, 1795]; Rodrigues, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 23 Fructidor an VII [Sept., 9, 1799].

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Pereire, Bordeaux, to Fonseca, Rochefort, 28 Brumaire, an IV [Nov., 19, 1795]. “Encore un petit bénéfice [sic] à t’annoncer: l’Amst[erda]me. que nous avons pris à 17/3^e a été négocié le lendemain à 1/2; ce qui nous laisse vingt mille livres à partager entre quatre.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Fonseca, Rochefort, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 6 Floréal an III [Apr., 25, 1795].

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, Toulouse, 2 Floréal an IV [Apr., 21, 1796].

³⁸ Paul Butel, “Guerre et blocus sous la Révolution et l’Empire,” in *État, finances et économie pendant la Révolution Française: Colloque tenu à Bercy les 12, 13, 14 octobre 1989 à l’occasion du Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française* (Paris, 1991), 573-74.

³⁹ “Si je me livre à quelque affaire je veux que ce soit pour un court terme.... Acheter & vendre voilà la seule chose que je veuille faire dans ma position. Je ne puis me conduire différemment sans compromettre ma tranquillité [sic]. L’ambition n’aura jamais d’empire sur moi aux dépens de l’honneur.” AFP, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, Bayonne, 1 Floréal an III [Apr., 20, 1795].

Fonseca counselled his friends to draw up a plan, consistent with the situation and their means, “if God wants to support us” he added, “to maintain us in a happy and *independent* mediocrity.”⁴⁰

While they conducted business through their letters they also shared other concerns, and reconciling their religious identity with their status as citizens of the new republic was certainly on their minds. In St. Esprit in 1793-94, Fonseca and Pereire had founded a Jacobin club, the membership of which appears to have been exclusively Jewish.⁴¹ On the celebration of the Festival of the Supreme Being in May 1794, they had attempted to integrate elements of the Torah in a revolutionary prayer which received wide circulation and praise from within Sephardic Jewish circles in the south-west.⁴² The event is reminiscent, though with some significant differences, of an earlier celebration by the Jews of Metz, who sang a Hebrew version of the Marseillaise in the Metz synagogue to celebrate an important military victory.⁴³

Rodrigues, however, was clearly unimpressed with the result of his friends’ efforts, writing that

When the king was celebrated, it was with the support of the bible, when we adore freedom, the powerful weapons of reason and the imposing majesty of the skies, the glowing radiance of day rising over the seas, the reproduction of beings; all proclaim a creative principle, a supreme intelligence, an infinite power, a limitless benevolence. What is the use of mingling these pure truths with the results of prophecies and thus see divinity in things only human. It is in the progress of philosophy and, by consequence that of public reason, which have overthrown Despotism, founded the Republic and reminded man of the exercise of the inalienable rights he owes to nature.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ “Si Dieu veut nous seconder; de nous maintenir dans une heureuse et *indépendante* [sic] médiocrité.” Ibid., Fonseca, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 24 Fructidor, an VII [Sept., 10, 1799].

⁴¹ The *Société montagnarde et régénérée de la constitution de 1793 de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. The name of the town had been changed to “Jean-Jacques Rousseau.”

⁴² Henri Léon, *Histoire des juifs de Bayonne* (1893; rpt. Marseille: 1976), 164. The prayer read as follows: “Que les races futures ne perdent pas de vue la dignité de l’homme et ses devoirs envers toi et la patrie. Suprême intelligence, il n’est qu’un Dieu! Il n’est que toi qui règnes sur le monde; c’est l’univers qui est ton temple, il publie tes merveilles et ta puissance! Nos coeurs sont tes autels! C’est dans ce sanctuaire que ta justice doit faire abhorrer le crime, chérir la vertu et respecter les lois! Achève, achève, ô Divinité tutélaire, de faire triompher la liberté, et nous porterons à ta louange tes trophées glorieux dans le Temple de la Raison.

Qu’il nous préserve de la flamme, ce fléau destructeur de toutes propriétés, et que l’Être Suprême nous envoya, dans sa colère, pour nous punir d’avoir négligé son culte et adoré le veau d’or; et fais qu’un jour, enfin, l’univers retentisse des noms sacrés de la liberté, de l’égalité et de la justice.”

⁴³ That of Thionville. Ronald Schechter, “Translating the “Marseillaise”: Biblical Republicanism and the Emancipation of Jews in Revolutionary France,” *Past and Present* 142 (1994): 108-35.

⁴⁴ “Lorsqu’on encensait les rois, c’était à l’appui de la bible, lorsqu’on adore la liberté les puissantes armes de la raison et l’imposante majesté des cieus, la brillante clarté du jour soulevemant [sic] des mers, la reproduction des êtres, tout annonce un principe créateur, une intelligence suprême, une puissance infinie, une bonté sans bornes. A quoi bon mêler à ces vérités pures l’accomplissement des prophéties, et regarder par là comme divin des choses purement humaines. C’est le progrès de la philosophie et par conséquent ceux de la raison publique qui ont renversé le Despotisme, fondé la république et rappelée l’homme à l’exercice des droits imprescriptibles [sic] qu’il tient de la nature.”

AFP, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to “I. de J. Pereyre chez l’héritier d’Ic. Levy à J.J Rousseau Lez-Bayonne, 23 Prairial an II [June 11, 1794] de l’ère française.”

Rodrigues' enthusiastic affirmation of Robespierre's ideas may well have pleased Pereire, though not necessarily his implicit rejection of Judaism. For Pereire, who was in Bayonne at that time awaiting deployment, and Fonseca seem to have played equivocal roles in protecting Jews from suspicions harboured by the local *Comité de Surveillance* about public expressions of religion. The Jews there had continued to burn Sabbath lamps and to observe the Sabbath despite restrictions imposed from Paris; they hid religious objects made of precious metals when it was demanded they give them up.⁴⁵ When he returned to Bordeaux, Fonseca was among those who successfully challenged the Administration on its confiscation within the terms of the *biens-nationaux* of the land on which the Jewish cemetery was situated.⁴⁶ Both were to remain practicing Jews to the end. Their conception of the Revolution was thus filtered through their attachment to Judaism, attempting, in the style of the Jews of Metz, to integrate their religion with patriotic zeal.⁴⁷

Rodrigues, however, saw only contradictions between the two, his stance intransigent, antithetical to Judaism. This is borne out further in his repudiation of the prophecies, which he characterized as a superstition which one must destroy.

In spite of the prophecy of Hosea and of all the prophecies possible, France would not take long to bear the yoke of its past oppressors, if she neglected public education, a fertile source of happiness and prosperity for the nations that cultivate it. That is the real prophecy, the one that never lies.⁴⁸

Rodrigues' position may seem merely to confirm what some historians have written of the Bordeaux Sephardim, that "their Judaism, already of limited spiritual significance and having lost its pragmatic function, [had become] for many... an impediment to the future progress and happiness of mankind."⁴⁹ But the history of the Sephardim, as Gérard Nahon and Ronald Schechter have argued, also showed a strong attachment to religion, albeit one which differed from the Ashkenazim of the north-east.⁵⁰ The divergence of faith, attachment and opinion which was staked out by these three correspondents was, however, to become more pervasive over the next century.

While these Sephardim may have differed in their responses to the religious questions inherent in the decree of emancipation, they shared enthusiasm for and engagement in the singular events which had brought about emancipation. The letters exchanged between Pereire and Rodrigues in 1794, the political club founded by Fonseca

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Pierre Hourmat, *Histoire de Bayonne, tome II: La Révolution 1789-1799* (Bayonne, 1992), 226, 261, 271.

⁴⁶ AFP, Fonseca, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 24 Fructidor an VII [Sept., 10, 1799]. See also *Mémoires à consulter et consultation, pour les citoyens français, professant le culte judaïque à Bordeaux* (Bordeaux, 1799).

⁴⁷ Schechter, "'Translating the 'Marseillaise,'" 125-26.

⁴⁸ "En dépit de la prophétie d'Osée et de toutes les prophéties possibles, France ne tarderait pas à subir le joug de ses anciens usurpateurs, si elle négligeait l'instruction publique, source féconde de Bonheur & de prospérités pour les nations qui la cultivent; voilà la véritable prophétie, celle qui ne ment jamais." AFP, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, Bayonne, 23 Prairial an II [June 11, 1794].

⁴⁹ Malino, *Sephardic Jews of Bordeaux*, 112.

⁵⁰ Ronald Schechter has addressed the numerous charges against the Sephardim in his *Obstinate Hebrews*, 26-30, as has Gérard Nahon in *Juifs et Judaïsme à Bordeaux* (Bordeaux, 2003), 132-37.

and Pereire, and Fonseca's Prayer to the Supreme Being all convey a wholehearted support for the Revolution. Moreover their revolutionary zeal, which survived the reprisals against the *bordelais* resulting from the Federalist revolt and the Terror against the Bordeaux commercial world, was not manufactured out of fear. Indeed, it showed remarkable resilience in the face of these dangers and a commitment to the new order.

What was equally remarkable about the correspondence, however, was the close friendship exhibited and the degree of affection freely expressed. The friendship we find here is personal, apparently voluntary, and intimate, exploring friendship's boundaries and the limitless tasks to which it might be put. The correspondents frequently used the words "friend" (*ami*), "friendship" (*amitié*), and "friendly" (*amicalement*):

No one puts more zeal and devotion into friendship than you [wrote Rodrigues to Pereire]. Your private letter gave me that proof that I did not need. I am in luck to have chosen as the most intimate of my friends one who sums up all the qualities of friendship. Mr Pereyre, believe that Rodrigues is deserving of your friendship that you bear him... I embrace you so often in my thoughts.⁵¹

This was written in June 1794 [23 Prairial an II]. A few months later, and forced by pressure of business to be brief, the same writer explained himself thus:

I must be brief in spite of all my desire to indulge in the effusions of the heart that are the charm and essence of letters between friends. Divine all I could say to you with the perfect knowledge you have of my feelings and my heart and believe me your friend for life.⁵²

Rodrigues believed that Pereire knew his thoughts and feelings intimately. In his narrow escape from Bayonne at the fall of Robespierre, Fonseca wrote to Pereire:

Do not exhort us to love each other; it would useless. The die is cast, this is for life and if we rise from the dead we will love each other once more.⁵³

A few days later he wrote:

⁵¹ "On ne peut mettre pas plus de zèle et de dévouement que toi dans l'amitié. Ta lettre particulière m'a donné cette preuve dont je n'en avais besoin. Il est heureux pour moi d'avoir choisi pour le plus intime de mes amis celui qui réunit toutes les qualités pour l'être. Crois Monsieur Pereyre, que Rodrigues est digne de l'amitié que tu lui portes Je t'embrasse mille et millions de fois dans ma pensée." AFP, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, Bayonne, 23 Prairial an II [June 11, 1794].

⁵² "Je suis forcé d'être bref malgré tout le désir que j'aurais à mon tour de me livrer à des effusions de cœur qui font le charme & l'essence d'une correspondance amicale. Devine tout ce que je pourrais te dire par la connaissance parfaite que tu as de mes sentiments & de mon cœur, & crois-moi toujours ton ami pour la vie." Ibid., Rodrigues fils 'Au Républicain I de J Pereyre chez Cathérine à JJ Rousseau Lez-Bayonne' [sic], 15 Fructidor an II [Sept, 1, 1794].

⁵³ "Ne nous recommandons pas de nous aimer, ça serait chose inutile. Le sort en est jeté, c'est pour la vie & si nous ressuscitions [sic] nous nous aimerons encore." Ibid., letter written by Rodrigues on behalf of Fonseca, Bordeaux, to Pereire, probably in Bayonne, 3 Fructidor an II [Aug., 20, 1794].

The hour for the post has come and I only have the time left to pledge what you already know but what I like to repeat: while I still have a breath of life you will be my beloved friend.⁵⁴

No letters of this period from Pereire to Rodrigues have survived. But in Pereire's letters to Fonseca, the sentiment was generally as affectionate as that which Rodrigues expressed to him:

'I neglect you particularly,' you say in one of the tender letters to the dear Rodrigues; ah! If the phrase which follows this reproach did not ease the injustice, how I would growl at you! Nothing in the world, my friend, is more precious to you than me! How soothing is this expression to my heart and how intoxicating to my soul with the feelings it awakens!⁵⁵

The language of affection was not confined to the closing paragraphs. As Pereire wrote in a letter to Fonseca, the need to discuss business frustrated the communication of more interesting subjects of friendship:

Attentiveness to different commercial letters which call for the greatest meticulousness, especially in these times, has distracted me from several entreaties of friendship; nevertheless they cannot rob it of a just tribute. Even if I can only spare two lines, I must write to my dear Fonseca.⁵⁶

The terms of the friendship also allowed for frankness and even rebuke. It appears that Pereire in particular could be a demanding correspondent, given to outbursts when he felt neglected or excluded. Resentful, and perhaps jealous, when Rodrigues and Fonseca happened to be in Paris at the same time, he evidently accused them of wasted effort, of putting pleasure before business and generally cavorting. Fonseca's response was conciliatory but firm:

⁵⁴ "Le moment au courrier arrive & il ne me reste que le temps de tasser [sic] ce que tu sais mais ce que j'aime repetter [sic]. Que tant que j'aurais un souffle [sic] de vie tu seras lami [sic] de mon cœur...." Ibid., Fonseca, Bordeaux, "Au Républicain I. de J. Pereyre chez Cathérine à J.J Rousseau Lez-Bayonne," 15 Fructidor an II [Sept., 1, 1794].

⁵⁵ "Je te néglige singulièrement dis-tu dans une des tendres lettres au cher Rodrigues; ah! Si la phrase qui suit ce reproche n'en adoucissait pas l'injustice, comme je te gronderais! Rien au monde, mon ami, ne t'est plus cher que moi! Combien cette expression est douce à mon cœur, et combien mon âme est enivrée par les sentiments qu'elle produit!" Ibid., Pereire, Bordeaux, to Fonseca, Rochefort, 29 Frimaire an IV [Dec., 20, 1795].

⁵⁶ "Le soin des différentes correspondances commerciales qui, dans ces moments surtout, exigent la plus grande exactitude, distraire indispensablement plusieurs instances à l'amitié, mais elle ne prive par celle-ci entièrement d'un juste tribut. Ne fasse donc que deux lignes, il faut que j'écrive à mon cher Fonseca." Ibid., Pereire, Bordeaux, to Fonseca, Rochefort, 24 Frimaire an IV [Dec., 15, 1795].

It is impossible that friends[hip] of our sort could grow sour. But if one was to fear that, you would be forced to admit that the one of us who made the most sacrifices to prevent this misfortune would not be you.⁵⁷

There are suggestions also that Pereire may have made financial errors which, if uncorrected, could have proved costly, earning reprimands from both his friends. Fonseca confronted Pereire, chastising him at length for his complaints and the sarcasm about what Pereire saw as unsatisfactory progress in their business dealings.⁵⁸

The historiography on friendship in this period has been based principally on its depiction in fiction and in philosophical writings. While there has been some consideration of friendship as it emerges in letters there has been apparently little consideration of letters written by Jews. David Garrioch, for example, has described how Enlightenment literature offered possible models for expression to its readers.⁵⁹ All three Sephardim discussed here were such readers, apparent from the libraries they are known to have kept. Fonseca in particular had a voluminous library, featuring seventy volumes of Voltaire, thirty six of Rousseau, seven of David Hume and four of Adam Smith among a much larger number of books.⁶⁰ Other Sephardim also disposed of impressive libraries, and by 1800 there existed in Bordeaux a Sephardic learned society.⁶¹ Volumes of correspondence were presented to the reading public as models for personal imitation. Madame de Sévigné's letters were immensely popular throughout the eighteenth century. Voltaire's *Lettres Choisies* were published in 1779. A more overtly didactic tool, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets*, appeared in 1761.⁶² It is not known whether all three correspondents possessed these volumes, though the first two books were certainly in Fonseca's collection. Nevertheless the language they each employed in their letters reveals a literacy and a sophistication which drew on Enlightenment literature with which they were familiar.

This knowledge of Enlightenment literature was not necessarily a common feature of Sephardic life, however. The substantial contemporary Sephardic figure, Salomon Lopès Dubec, wrote in his autobiography that he "learned to read Hebrew and French; to write, arithmetic, and the operations of the exchange: that was the only instruction given

⁵⁷ "Il est impossible que des amis de notre espèce puissent s'aigrir. Mais si cela était à craindre tu serais forcé d'avouer que celui de nous deux qui faisait le plus de sacrifices pour prévenir ce malheur, ce ne serait pas toi." Fonseca, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 24 Fructidor an VII [Sept., 10, 1799].

⁵⁸ Ibid., Fonseca, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 12 Prairial an V [31 May 1797] and 24 Fructidor an VII [Sept., 10, 1799].

⁵⁹ David Garrioch, "From Christian Friendship to Secular Sentimentality: Enlightenment Re-evaluations" in *Friendship: A History*, Barbara Caine, ed. (London, 2010), 197-202.

⁶⁰ ADG, 3 E 24125, Mathieu notaire: Fonseca neveu Inventaire, Feb., 5, 1806, and 3 E 24127, Mathieu notaire: Isaac Rodrigues Pereire Inventaire, Dec., 10, 1806.

⁶¹ Jean Cavignac, "L'Apport des israélites bordelais aux arts et lettres au cours du XIXe siècle," *Revue des Études Juives* 144:4 (1985): 343-61. In 1800, another Isaac Rodrigues, together with David Gradis, founded the *Société Polymathique du Muséum* in Bordeaux. Jews were also members of the *Musée de Bordeaux*, founded in 1783.

⁶² See Janet Gurkin Altman, "The Letter Book as a Literary Institution 1539-1789: Toward a Cultural History of Published Correspondence in France," special issue, *Yale French Studies* 71 (1986): 53-57. Fonseca also held volumes of Mme de Sévigné's letters in his library.

to Jewish children.”⁶³ We can only speculate on the educational attainments of the Sephardic writers here. But while there are imperfections in the letters – punctuation could be erratic and there are spelling errors – the ideas presented and the fluency with which they were expressed indicate a comparatively good level of education. The *bayonnais* Jews in particular achieved a high rate of literacy quite early and placed a significant value on education, which might account for Fonseca’s aptitude for the written word.⁶⁴ The standards imposed on Bordeaux Sephardim were less rigorous, but Pereire’s father had mixed with Enlightenment figures in Paris, Diderot and D’Alembert among them, and there is some evidence that in his early education at least his son received a standard of instruction commensurate with the father’s status and predilections.⁶⁵ Less is known about Rodrigues but on the evidence of these letters his natural gifts for expression seem to have been supported by a solid foundation.

The Sephardic correspondence was full of expressions of endearment. But such demonstrativeness was also symptomatic of an era when, as Marie-Claire Grassi’s analysis of eighteenth-century letters written by members of the nobility reveals, letters of friendship between men and love letters between men and women were equally characterized by verbal effusiveness, an expectation of reciprocity in affection, and the use of “constructions reflecting on the uniqueness of the person loved.”⁶⁶ Thus the Enlightenment “legitimized emotional outpourings which in the twentieth century became confined to lovers.”⁶⁷ This may well be so, but as Mireille Bossis then cautions us: “We are not familiar enough with past attitudes to distinguish what belonged to the general code and what was a creative innovation on the part of the individual.”⁶⁸

It is useful, then, to contemplate the degree to which these expressions of friendship are formulaic or, alternatively, the product of the individual imagination. Fortuitously, there is a ready-made source of comparison for such an analysis within the documents themselves: their references to the women in their lives. The writers refer to their wives, daughters, and aunts with some frequency, although invariably consigning them to the closing paragraph. Rodrigues’ messages were the most effusive. It is not only he who bore great affection and “friendship” for Pereire, he wrote, but Sara-Sophie, his fiancée, “has the most lively friendship and the most heartfelt esteem for you.”⁶⁹ And again:

⁶³ “On me fit apprendre à lire le français et l’hébreu; à écrire, l’arithmétique et les opérations de change; c’était alors la seule instruction qu’on donnait aux enfants israélites.” Cavignac, “L’Autobiographie de Salomon Lopès Dubec,” 11.

⁶⁴ Gérard Nahon, “Le Livre dans la ‘nation’ juive portugaise de Saint-Esprit Bayonne aux XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles,” paper presented at the *IVe Centenaire du Détournement de l’Adour 1578-1978* (Bayonne 28-29 October 1978), 202-04. Nahon claims that by the eighteenth century, 100 per cent of *bayonnais* Sephardic men were literate and 84.6 per cent of Sephardic women, creating a large demand for books which was met through clandestine channels in Amsterdam.

⁶⁵ Edouard Seguin, *Jacob-Rodrigues Pereire... Notice sur sa Vie et ses Travaux* (Paris, 1847), 192. Seguin noted that the young Pereire was “au collège” at the time of his father’s death.

⁶⁶ Marie-Claire Grassi, “Friends and Lovers (Or the Codification of Intimacy),” Special Issue, *Yale French Studies* 71 (1986): 83. Grassi analysed the formulae employed in 1100 letters written by members of the French nobility during three distinct periods, 1700-1770, 1770-1820, and 1820-1860.

⁶⁷ Garrioch, “From Christian Friendship,” 199.

⁶⁸ Bossis, “Methodological Journeys,” 72.

⁶⁹ His fiancée “a pour toi l’amitié la plus vive, & l’estime la mieux sentie” AFP, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, ‘chez l’héritier de Ic. Levy à J.J Rousseau-Lez-Bayonne, 4 Fructidor an II [Aug., 21, 1794].’

Dear Sophie will always see with pleasure the witnesses of esteem and of friendship that you give her. She begs you to believe that no one is more sincerely attached to you than she is.⁷⁰

These expressions, in which the sentiments of one are filtered through the writing of another to forward to a third party, seem to come straight out of the letter manuals, unlike the expressions which pass directly between writer and recipient. The effusive expressions of affection, friendship and even of love between the three Sephardic men, while not untypical in letters influenced by Enlightenment literature, on the other hand, seem to have been products of their creative imagination rather than of formula, written with sincerity, boldly acknowledging their close personal friendship, regard and intimacy and fortified with Enlightenment learning.⁷¹

Education was thus pivotal for the Sephardic friends in taking on French values and culture, in what Phyllis Cohen Albert has termed “acculturation.”⁷² The correspondents’ use of French rather than Judeo-Spanish, their familiarity with Enlightenment sensibilities, the ease with which they expressed feelings and emotions, all these shed some light on the process of adaptation through which the Jews of France were evolving in their relationship to the state.

How might this friendship be explained? The close relationship they shared was clearly the basis of the trust they evidently had in each other. The three were doing business together, they were not competing nor is there any sense or evidence in the letters that they sought advantage by exploiting one another. Their friendship differed from that of the Jacobins described by Marisa Linton, in which personal relationships influenced the public domain significantly and carried an impact on political decisions and events.⁷³ It differed also from Saint-Just’s revolutionary concept of friendship as evidence of public virtue and which found its way into the names of revolutionary clubs.⁷⁴ Indeed, the nature of this Sephardic friendship has more resonance with the ideas of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers Adam Smith and David Hume, discussed by the sociologist Allan Silver. Smith argued, for example, that it was “commercial society” (or market society) which had made personal friendship possible, allowing a distinction to be drawn between, on the one hand, sympathetic relationships which excluded calculation and caste and, on the other, impersonal relationships emerging from the calculativeness

⁷⁰ “La chère Sophie verra toujours avec plaisir les témoignages d’estime & d’amitié que tu lui donner. Elle te prie de croire que personne ne t’est plus sincèrement attaché qu’elle.” Ibid., Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire ‘chez Catherine à J.J. Rousseau, lez-Bayonne.’ 15 Fructidor an II [Sept., 1, 1794].

⁷¹ Grassi writes that between 1740-70, imitation of the classical form was abandoned in favour of an aesthetic of originality, the letter becoming a space for personal and artistic growth. Although the letters studied here were written twenty-five years later this interpretation appears consistent with their intent. See Marie-Claire Grassi, “Friends and Lovers,” 59.

⁷² Phyllis Cohen Albert, “Ethnicity and Jewish Solidarity in Nineteenth-Century France” in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, eds., Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski (Durham, NC, 1982), 249-74.

⁷³ Marisa Linton, “Fatal Friendships: The Politics of Jacobin Friendship,” *French Historical Studies* 31:1 (2008): 51-76.

⁷⁴ Anne Vincent-Buffault, *L’Exercice de l’amitié: Pour une histoire des pratiques amicales aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Paris, 1995), 110-12, in which she discusses Saint-Just’s *Institutions républicaines*. See also Garrioch, “From Christian Friendship,” 204-6.

of utility, determined by instrumentalism and contract.⁷⁵ The Sephardic correspondence is consistent with David Hume's dictum:

Although self-interested commerce ... begins to dominate in society, it does not abolish the more generous and noble intercourse of friendship and good offices. I may still do services to such persons as I love, and am more particularly acquainted with, without any prospect of advantage.⁷⁶

Charles Tilly deals, in *Trust and Rule*, with a concept of networks based on trust, in the course of which he refers to the consequences of the Jacobins' destruction, or co-optation, of previously autonomous trust networks, such as religious confraternities.⁷⁷ Tilly brings to mind the situation of the Bordeaux Jews, made precarious by the dismantling of the community structures which had hitherto sustained them. The condition of the Assembly in granting emancipation to the Sephardim in 1790, "to refuse everything to the Jews as a Nation, and grant everything to the Jews as individuals," in Clermont-Tonnerre's often-quoted terms, had a palpable effect.⁷⁸ The *Mahamad* (Sephardic council), which had regulated the Sephardim in their social and economic as well as their religious lives, considered now a means of enforcing "particularism," had been abolished. The *Société de bienfaisance* which replaced it temporarily to ease the burden on the Sephardic poor was also dispatched. No longer regulated or supported the Sephardim were thus forced to renegotiate persons and situations of trust at a time of crisis.

Fonseca, Pereire and Rodrigues placed trust in each other in numerous significant ways. One or other made investments on behalf of all three throughout the period, empowered to make financial decisions which affected the other two. Rodrigues kept Pereire's accounts and looked after his funds while the latter was in the *Armée*.⁷⁹ At Fonseca's request, Pereire found a school for Fonseca's son and arranged for his board and lodgings.⁸⁰ Indeed, Fonseca expected that Pereire would play an even more significant role in his son's life, writing of "one of those sacred duties which you will

⁷⁵ Silver has dealt at length in a number of articles with the ideas of the Scottish philosophers on friendship. See Allan Silver, "Friendship and Trust as Moral Ideals: An Historical Approach," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 30 (1989): 274-97; Silver, "Friendship in Commercial Society: Eighteenth-century Social Theory and Modern Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 95:6 (1990): 1474-1504; Silver, "Two Different Sorts of Commerce': Friendship and Strangership in Civil Society," in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, eds. Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (Chicago, 1997), 43-74. Silver uses Adam Smith's definition of Commercial Society as one in which 'every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant and the society itself grows to be what is properly called a commercial society.' See Silver's "Two Different Sorts of Commerce," fn. 6, in which he is quoting Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [1776], 3.

⁷⁶ Silver, "Two Different Sorts of Commerce," 49, here quoting David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1749; reprint. Oxford, 1978), 521.

⁷⁷ Charles Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (Cambridge, 2005), 4 and 94-99.

⁷⁸ "Refuser tout aux Juifs comme Nation, & accorder tout aux Juifs comme individus," M. le Comte Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre, député de Paris, *Opinion de ...*, (Paris, 1789), 13.

⁷⁹ AFP, Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Pereire, Bayonne, 7 Prairial an III [May, 26, 1795].

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Pereire, Bordeaux, to Fonseca, Rochefort, 28 Brumaire, an IV [Nov., 19, 1795].

fulfill one day towards my son.”⁸¹ Some time after Rodrigues left permanently to live in Paris, Pereire also arranged the sale of Rodrigues’ library and furniture in Bordeaux.⁸²

So far as Fonseca, the senior member of the three, was concerned, the friendship may have been a means also of exerting some influence over the future. Arranged marriages were the norm in Sephardic circles as they were in Ashkenazic, but the Revolution had opened the way for some renegotiation of relationships between the sexes just as it disturbed profoundly the status quo within the Sephardic world. Both Pereire, the son of one of Bordeaux’s most renowned Sephardic figures, and Rodrigues, the son of a merchant and property-owner, would certainly have presented themselves as attractive prospective husbands. Fonseca more than likely saw his young friends in this light.

Trust in the Sephardic community was becoming a precious commodity and this is verified by these letters, written at a time when the cohesion which had existed before the Revolution was beginning to unravel. The effects of bankruptcies were pervasive, fraying the bonds which had once united it. Debtors defaulted on accounts, credit was scarce, some Sephardim displayed notably bad faith in their dealings with co-religionists, family members betrayed expectations of trust.⁸³ Pereire reflected on Roblès, a relation of Fonseca, that “cunning, treachery and duplicity form the character of that man” (l’astuce, la perfidie et la duplicité forment le caractère de cet homme); former friends had become “strange and wicked” (étrange et méchant), filled with “ingratitude and injustice” (l’ingratitude et l’injustice).⁸⁴

What, then, can we make of these letters, fragmentary, lacunate and few as they are? At one level, certainly, they introduce us to the problematic commercial world created by the French Revolution. In addition they illustrate the attempts individuals made either to integrate their religion with their new citizenship or to explore altogether new ways of interpreting what citizenship might mean for them. But on a different plane altogether, and in circumstances of considerable adversity, these writers took refuge and solace in close personal friendship as they contemplated both the loss of security and continuity inherent in the structures on which Jewish solidarity had been so carefully crafted, and the new demands which emancipation and universalism were to place on them as citizens.⁸⁵

⁸¹ “Un de ces devoirs sacrés que tu rempliras un jour envers mon fils.” Ibid., Fonseca, Paris, to Pereire, Bordeaux, 24 Fructidor an VII [Sept., 10, 1799].

⁸² Ibid., Pereire, Bordeaux, to Rodrigues, Paris, 15 Ventôse an XI [Mar., 6, 1803]. These are all examples used by Charles Tilly to delineate networks of people who trust one another (“trust networks”) from other kinds of networks. Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 6.

⁸³ AFP, passim.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Pereire, Bordeaux, to Fonseca, Rochefort, undated; Rodrigues, Bordeaux, to Fonseca, Rochefort, 28 Brumaire an IV [Nov., 19, 1795].

⁸⁵ Isaac Rodrigues moved to Paris late in 1796, becoming a highly-skilled *teneur des livres*, an accountant/bookkeeper. Having started working life there with Boyer-Fonfrède he later found employment with the Jewish banking firm, B. Fould et cie. In Bordeaux, Fonseca and Pereire went into a marine insurance business together which, as the new century progressed, suffered one disaster after another. Fonseca died late in 1805, and soon after the marine insurance business was bankrupt. Pereire, who never recovered from the bitterness of this failure, died the following year, probably the victim of a smallpox epidemic. After a further sixteen years, Rodrigues finally succeeded in persuading Pereire’s widow, Rebecca-Henriette Lopès Fonseca, to move to Paris with her two sons where they lived with him and Sara-Sophie for some time. He gave them their start in life, and his sons, Olinde and Eugène, became in their turn the best friends of their cousins, Emile and Isaac Pereire.