

Jews in the Netherlands:

a Short History

**Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld
and Bart Wallet**

Amsterdam University Press

This publication was made possible by financial contributions from the Dr Henriette Boas Stichting and the foundation Joods Maatschappelijk Werk (JMW). The contribution by JMW was financed in part by the Voormalige Goudse Stichting voor Joodse Sociale Arbeid.



Translated from the Dutch by Liz Waters

Cover illustration: View of the Great Synagogue and the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, c.1680, Gerrit Adriaenszoon Berckheyde. Collection of the Jewish Museum Amsterdam: M 011075.

Cover design and lay-out: Margreet van de Burgt

ISBN 978 94 6372 669 6

e-ISBN 978 90 4855 779 0

DOI 10.5117/9789463726696

NUR 716

© Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld, Bart Wallet / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2023

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes they hold rights in this material is advised to contact the publisher.

Contents

Introduction by the authors	9
1295 Middle Ages: Jodenstraat in Maastricht	10
1600 <i>Seventeenth century: the century of 'New Jews'</i>	12
1602 Beth Jacob	14
1608 Samuel Pallache	16
1614 Beth Haim in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel	18
1615 Santa Companhia de Dotar Orphas e Donzellas	20
1615 Hugo Grotius's <i>Remonstrantie</i>	22
1616 Talmud Torah	24
1635 Founding of the Ashkenazi congregation Amsterdam	26
1641 Salom Italia in Amsterdam	28
1641 Kahal Kados Zur Israel in Brazil	30
1642 The model of Solomon's Temple	32
1642 Abodat Haahesed, workhouse for Ashkenazim	34
1644 The start of the Jewish silk industry	36
1645 The <i>Thesovro dos dinim</i> of Menasseh ben Israel	38
1647 Dr. Ephraim Bueno	40
1656 The <i>cherem</i> (ban) issued against Spinoza	42
1656 Prominent spiritual leadership in the seventeenth century: Saul Levi Morteira and Isaac Aboab da Fonseca	44
1661 Athias's Bible	46
1666 Sabbatai Zevi, the mystical messiah	48
1675 Consecration of the Portuguese synagogue	50
1683 Jewish historians in the early modern period	52
1687 Isaac/Balthazar Orobio de Castro	54
1688 Portuguese Jewish Diplomacy	56

1690	Hesqia da Silva and international philanthropy	58
1692	Sara Dias da Fonseca	60
1696	The <i>Aansprekersoproer</i>	62

1700 *Eighteenth century: a time of expansion and stability* 64

1702	Baruch/Benedictus Levi Gomperts	66
1708	Spanish edition of Aboab's <i>Menorat ha-Ma'or</i>	68
1710	Chacham Tsvi	70
1721	The pharmacy owned by Esther, widow of physician Jacob de Castro	72
1723	Doornburgh and other country estates on the Amstel and the Vecht	74
1725	Zwolle, The Hague and Rotterdam: newly emerging Jewish communities	76
1725	<i>Mikra meforash</i>	78
1734	Mazon Habanot	80
1737	A Jewish quota in Leiden	82
1740	Musical performance in the house of Francesco Lopes de Liz	84
1740	Founding of the Beth Hamidrash Ets Haim	86
1742	Isaac de Pinto	88
1743	Mozes Chaim Luzatto and <i>La-Yesharim Tehillah</i>	90
1744	Tobias Boas	92
1747	The Surinam project	94
1748	Jewish diamond cutters and the guild	96
1749	Mishenet Zequenim	98
1756	Admittance of Jews to Brielle	100
1773	Theft in Diemen: Jews and gangs of robbers	102
1787	Benjamin Cohen and Jewish Orangists	104
1795	Counting Dutch Jews throughout the ages	106
1795	The Founding of Felix Libertate and the split between the <i>Alte</i> and <i>Naye Kille</i>	108
1796	Emancipation decree	110
1797	First Jewish parliamentarians	112

1800	<i>Nineteenth century: the century of integration</i>	114
1808	Upper Consistory	116
1809	Pekidim and Amarkalim	118
1814	Israelite denomination	120
1817	Decision on education: Jews must learn Dutch	122
1827	The brothers Hirschel, Jacob and Akiba Lehren	124
1830	Belgian Revolution	126
1832	First Dutch-language sermon in Middelburg	128
1833	Van Blijdesteijn	130
1836	Dutch Israelite Seminary	132
1845	Dike synagogue in Sliedrecht	134
1852	Salomonson steam engine in Nijverdal	136
1856	Seven-penny prayerbook	138
1857	Van der Brugghen Education Act	140
1860	Michel Henri Godefroi: the first Jewish government minister	142
1865	Founding of the <i>Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad</i>	144
1874	Joseph Hirsch Dünner becomes chief rabbi	146
1880	Abraham Carel Wertheim	148
1881	Arrival of eastern European Jews	150
1890	<i>The Talmud Jew</i>	152
1894	Founding of the General Diamond Workers' Union of the Netherlands	154
1899	Founding of the Dutch Zionist League	156
1900	<i>Twentieth century: a century of extremes</i>	158
1905	Blue collecting tin of the Jewish National Fund	160
1908	Marcus's butcher business in Zwolle	162
1911	De Joodse Invalide	164
1928	Ben Brill at the Olympic Games	166
1929	Start of the Reform Congregation of The Hague	168

1933	Arrival of German Jews	170
1939	Westerbork	172
1941	The Jewish Council	174
1942	Anne Frank	176
1945	Return	178
1945	Johannes Vermeerstraat	180
1946	Joods Maatschappelijk Werk	182
1947	Convention of the Jewish Youth Federation	184
1948	Celebration of Israel in the Concertgebouw	186
1949	Anneke Beekman	188
1954	Jacob Soetendorp, rabbi of the Netherlands	190
1958	Buitenveldert and Amstelveen	192
1962	The Hollandsche Schouwburg	194
1966	Wedding of Beatrix and Claus	196
1967	Jewish mayors of Amsterdam	198
1970	Committee for Solidarity with Jews in the Soviet Union	200
1974	CIDI	202
1974	Start of the Cheider	204
1979	Yom Ha Football	206
1990	Woudschoten	208
1995	Beit Ha'Chidush	210
1997	Centraal Joods Overleg	212
2011	Debate on ritual slaughter	214
2012	Jewish Cultural Quarter	216
	Glossary	218
	Acknowledgements	219
	Bibliography	220

Introduction by the authors

Is it possible to describe in brief the essential elements of the history of the Jews in the Netherlands? Most people know little more than fragments of Dutch Jewish history: the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam; Jewish socialism; the devastating years of the Second World War. So where is the storyline? What happened to the Jews in the Netherlands from the moment they first settled there permanently? This book aims to present the main points of 700 years of Dutch Jewish history as a concise, continuous narrative. Many specialist studies and bulky textbooks have of course been written about the history of Jews in the Netherlands, but few of us get around to reading them. A succinct and accessible introduction to the main events has been lacking up to now. Our aim is to bring as many people as possible into contact, in a manner that makes it accessible, with the gripping and sometimes painful story of Jewish life in the Netherlands. We describe how a rapidly evolving Jewish minority succeeded in living, or sometimes merely surviving, in a Dutch society that was changing no less rapidly.

We have chosen to distil that story into a hundred entries that, taken together, present a balanced, representative picture of Dutch Jewish history. Each relates to a central event,

place, person or object that helps to explain one important aspect. Each has a short text of around four hundred words, accompanied by a striking, iconic image. They are grouped by century around unifying themes that make them part of an ongoing story.

The narrative takes us from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century, with attention paid to politics, economics, culture and religion, to important rabbis but also to the typical Jewish pedlar or to antisemitism in the Netherlands. The selection has been made in such a way that both well-known and little-known aspects of the past are brought to the fore. It includes both high points and low points. This book is not intended to be the last word on the subject or to give definitive answers. Our pretensions are limited in that respect; we could have opted for countless other places or events, and not everything fitted into the format of one hundred entries. But we intend it to be a resource that will give everybody the opportunity to gain a clear overall view, a starting point from which any reader can set out to find their own way through the story of the Jews in the Netherlands.

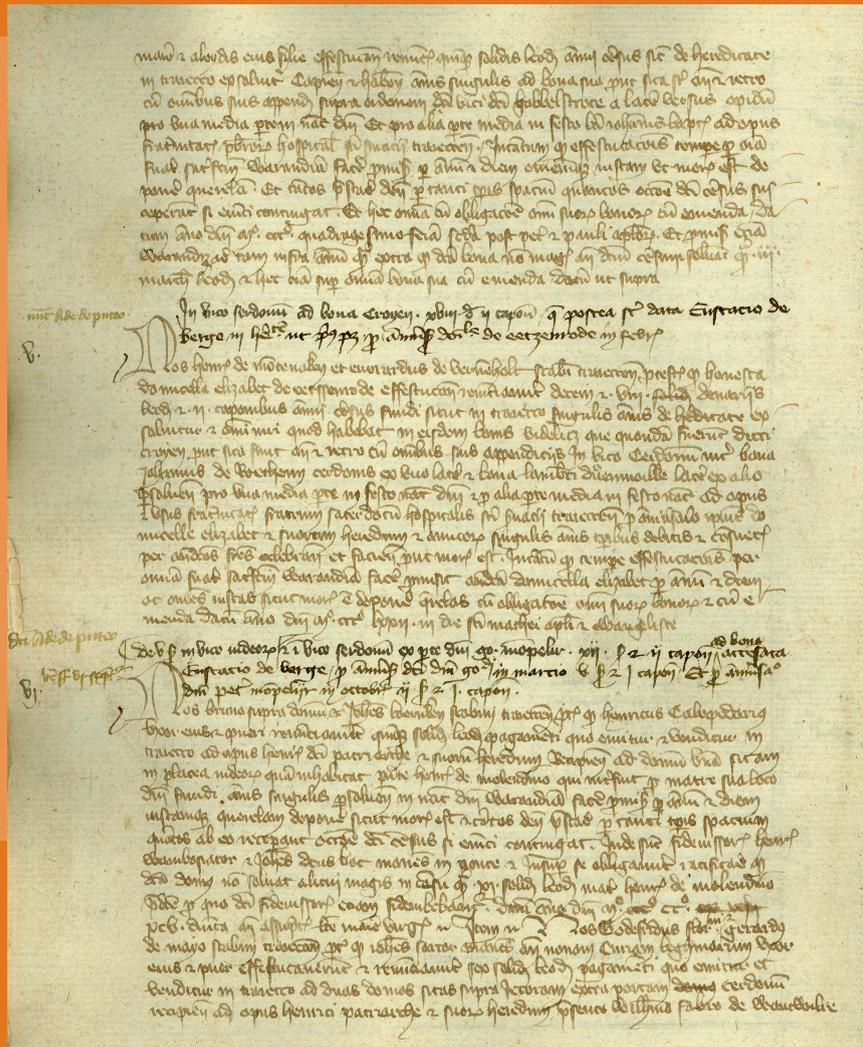
Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld and Bart Wallet

1295

Middle Ages: Jodenstraat in Maastricht

The street known as the Jodenstraat or 'platea judaeorum' in Maastricht was first mentioned in an alderman's document of 1295.

Collection of the Historisch Centrum Limburg, Maastricht: 14 B002 H, inv. no. 4, folio 43v. Broederschap der kapelanen Sint Servaas, Cartularium 1300–1469.



The Jodenstraat ('Jew Street') in Maastricht is one of the oldest streets in the city, in a small Jewish district that includes a synagogue and a Jewish school founded in about 1295. It represents clear evidence that Jewish people lived in the Low Countries during the Middle Ages. They settled here over the course of the thirteenth century and it is not hard to guess why, since the Jews were driven out of England in 1290 and out of France in 1306. In the south of what is now the Netherlands, and in some of its eastern regions, Jews found places where they believed they could settle permanently. All were on important trade routes. As well as Maastricht, we see Jews taking up residence in the same period in Diepenheim, Goor, Oldenzaal, Zwolle, Nijmegen, Doesburg, Zutphen and Roermond. They were mainly engaged in banking and moneylending. Jews in Gelderland enjoyed the protection of their duke, based on their status as servants (*servi*) of the sovereign. As a *quid pro quo*, the duke could impose taxes on them.

The Black Death that held western Europe in its grip from 1348 onwards put an end to the Jewish presence in those disparate towns. Jews were seen as enemies of the Church and the Christian community, and accused of being behind the outbreak of plague. They were said to have poisoned the wells. In the German terri-

tories and the southern Low Countries, Jews were burned, drowned and murdered in retaliation. As the death and devastation spread further north, Jews in Zwolle, Utrecht, Broek, Nijmegen, Zutphen, Deventer and Kampen were targeted by angry crowds, and for the time being, Jewish life ceased in the medieval towns of the northern Netherlands.

The situation soon changed, however. From 1368 onwards we again come upon Jews, in Nijmegen and Roermond, and later in Zwolle and Venlo. In the first half of the fifteenth century, Nijmegen developed into the most important Jewish centre in the region, with its own meat market, ritual baths and cemetery. Venlo, 's-Hertogenbosch and Doesburg now each had their own Jodenstraat. Persecutions in the neighbouring German territories were probably in part a response to the immigration of Jews to these regions.

Here too anti-Jewish measures made the situation increasingly unfavourable, especially since Jews were forced to wear a distinguishing mark. Accusations of usury made it more and more difficult for them to work in financial services, their most important source of income. Faced with increasing tensions, the Jews turned their backs on the Low Countries and in the sixteenth century they were no longer welcome. The initiative that led to a revival of settlement came from a quite different and unexpected direction.

“The Jodenstraat (“Jew Street”) in Maastricht is one of the oldest streets in the city, in a small Jewish district that includes a synagogue and a Jewish school founded in about 1295. It represents clear evidence that Jewish people lived in the Low Countries during the Middle Ages.”

1600

Seventeenth century: the century of 'New Jews'

View of the Great Synagogue and the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, c.1680, Gerrit Adriaenszoon Berckheyde.

Collection of the Jewish Museum
Amsterdam: M 011075.



Whereas in the late Middle Ages it had been increasingly hard for Jews to settle permanently in the Low Countries, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the Jewish presence grew once more. First to arrive were Spanish and Portuguese ‘New Christians’ or ‘Conversos’, who came from the Iberian Peninsula. Many now reverted to the original faith of ancestors who had converted to Christianity, whether of their own free will or under duress, from the end of the fourteenth century onwards. They thereby became ‘New Jews’. Out of nowhere, these Spanish and Portuguese Jews, who also became known as Sephardim, established a congregation, in theory intended only for members of the Spanish-Portuguese Jewish nation (*a nação* or *la nación*). Not long after, from the German territories, central Europe and Poland came High German and Polish Jews, known as Ashkenazim. It was the start of more than four centuries of continuous Jewish presence in the Republic of the Seven United Provinces and in the state that eventually became the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Both groups regarded the young Dutch Republic as an attractive destination, now that it had won its freedom from Spanish Catholic hegemony in a war of independence. The new state had set down freedom of conscience in what it regarded as a constitution, and Amsterdam was developing into a global trading centre that offered great economic opportunities to new migrants.

The Dutch Republic had no experience in regulating the Jewish presence in its midst. The States of Holland and West Friesland took the initiative by developing a body of Jewish Regulations (*Jodenreglement*), but these were not put into practice. In the end, the towns and villag-

es in that part of the country had to decide for themselves what the rules should be, although they were not permitted to force Jews to wear something to mark themselves out as Jewish. Other Dutch provinces followed, until every town and region had developed a series of statutes and a policy of its own. Some welcomed Jews on certain conditions, while others banned them from their territories. This reflects the medieval concept of the nation, according to which the legal position of ethnic minorities was regulated. Jews were responsible for their internal organization, including poor relief, education, care for the sick, and the maintenance of peace and order within their ranks. They could, however, rely on the support and protection of the authorities without a collective tax being imposed on them.

The distinction between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds was less sharply defined than such regulations suggest. Nowhere was there a ghetto. Jews and Christians met as neighbours, and increasingly in the worlds of trade and industry, scholarship and culture. True, anti-Jewish sentiments could sometimes be found on the Christian side, but above all there was enormous admiration for and interest in Jewish culture.

The Dutch Golden Age, roughly from 1588 to 1672, was a period when the Netherlands flourished in the religious, economic, cultural and social spheres, and its success benefitted all those living in the Dutch Republic, Jew and non-Jew alike. It was also a turbulent period of wars and epidemics, and the furore surrounding the arrival of the mystical messiah Sabbatai Zevi made the period even more deeply troubling for Jews. The Sephardi and Ashkenazi synagogues, built on the Muidergracht in Amsterdam in the 1670s, nevertheless attest to a triumph of stability and faith in the future.

‘The distinction between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds was less sharply defined than such regulations suggest. Nowhere was there a ghetto. Jews and Christians met as neighbours, and increasingly in the worlds of trade and industry, scholarship and culture.’