A NEW MOKUM:[1] THE JEWISH NEIGHBORHOOD IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY AMSTERDAM

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When the British traveler Edward Brown (1644-1708) visited Amsterdam in the early 1670s, he wandered into the Jewish neighborhood to observe something his contemporaries had described as an extraordinary scene. He wanted to see first hand the cause of their amazement. Brown would not be disappointed, as what he witnessed that day did indeed constitute an exceptional sight. Contrary to the persistent stereotype that defined the Jews of Europe as poor and unacculturated, as obstinate sinners who refused to acknowledge Christianity as the one true faith, most Jews in seventeenth century Amsterdam lived surprisingly similar lives to Dutch gentiles. Tolerated as one of many religious minorities, they enjoyed the Dutch Republic's freedom of conscience and encountered relatively few legal restrictions. Indeed, Brown wrote in his travel account,

> [T]he Jews live more handsomely and splendidly here, than in any other place: Their chief Synagogue is large, adorned with Lamps of Brass and Silver. We happened to be there at the Feast of their New Year; so that there (sic) blowing of Horns, shouting and singing was not omitted . . . I was sorry to see divers (sic) here to profess themselves publickly as Jews, who had lived at least as reputed Christians, for a long time in other places: One who had been a Franciscan Friar [for] thirty years; and another who had been [a] Professor some years at Thelouze, and before that [a] Physician to the King of Spain.[2]

Brown was impressed by the respectable living conditions of the Jews and by their elegant synagogue, although he could not hide his disappointment at seeing these very environs encourage newcomers to "return" to Judaism, particularly the *Conversos* who had previously lived as Catholics in Spain and Portugal. Brown insinuates that the uniqueness of the Amsterdam Jewish landscape lay not merely in its scale and voluntary

nature, in its architectural sophistication and conspicuous presence in the city center, but also in its effect on patterns of behavior. The visible presence of synagogues, schools, printing presses, slaughter and bathing houses cultivated a form of Jewish self-identification that rendered the practice of Judaism acceptable in the public realm. Mokum's *Joodse Buurt* or Jewish neighborhood thus had a dual function: it visually reminded residents of their religious heritage, inviting Jews to *publicly* live as Jews in a predominantly Christian society. Furthermore, the presence of this district expanded, rather than tested, the limits of toleration as it exposed gentile visitors such as Brown to an alternative reality – one in which non-Christians could enjoy some of the same privileges as Christians, such as freedom of conscience, ownership of land, and a sense of security.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, the Jewish communities in Mokum – particularly the Sephardim – became highly influential in Europe. Their participation in and contribution to the Dutch Republic's dominance in international commerce and finance allowed them to develop a culturally rich community. Indeed, the conditions in which both the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim lived and prospered during this time were, in the words of historian Jonathan Israel, quite "a-typical, particularly in the context of Jewish history at large."[3] The first *kehilla* (Jewish community) was established in Amsterdam in 1597 by a small number of Sephardic families who had come, by way of Antwerp, from Spain and Portugal as New Christians. Holland, which had thrown off the yoke of Spain two decades before and had renounced its allegiance in the Union of Utrecht in 1581, was an attractive place of refuge for Conversos as it was fervently anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic, and pro-business.[4] Unbound by residential restrictions – many European cities at this time confined Jewish settlement to peripheral areas or banned Jews altogether – they decided to settle on Vlooyenburg, an island in the river Amstel which today is the Waterlooplein. By 1620 the city had three Sephardi congregations, *Beth Ja'akob*, *Neve Shalom*, and *Beth Israel*, each of which had a synagogue of its own.[5] These houses of worship, which were located in close proximity to each other on the Houtgracht, were really converted warehouses and thus remained inconspicuous to the public eye. Sir William Brereton, a British traveler who attended a service in one of these

synagogues in June of 1634, speaks of "a neat place, an upper room."[6] He also tells us that at this time three hundred families were residing in Amsterdam,[7] and that they had a street named after them, namely "the Jewstreet" [Jodenbreestraat]. This comment corresponds to Philip von Zesen, who in his German guidebook of Amsterdam mentions that local Jews, "derer eine zimliche Anzahl hierherum wohnet, ihren Gottesdienst auf Sählen oder grossen Kammern [pflegen],"[8] that is, they worship in nondescript halls or rooms that were most likely rented by the community.

The city's Ashkenazim worshiped in Sephardic synagogues until the mid-1630s, after which they formed a congregation of their own. A financial loan from their Spanish-Portuguese co-religionists, meant as a gentle but firm push to help them establish their own community, led to the purchase of an Ashkenazic cemetery a few years later. There were only a small number of German Jews in Amsterdam at this time, many of whom had left Central Europe as the Thirty Years' War rendered an already difficult existence unbearable. The size of the *Hoogduitse Gemeenschap*, or High German community, would increase significantly over the course of the century as Jews, attracted by the growing reputation of Holland as a safe and prosperous place, settled in its urban centers. In contrast to their Spanish and Portuguese brethren, these Ashkenazim were predominantly poor, unacculturated, and from a highly traditional background. They were mostly petty traders who spoke Yiddish and whose exposure to the non-Jewish world – and the willingness to engage with it outside of the realm of commerce – had been minimal. However, the opportunities available in this port city, particularly with respect to religious observance, cultural life, and commercial activity, benefited the Ashkenazim just as much as the Sephardim, although historians generally agree that it was mostly due to the presence of the Spanish-Portuguese Jews that the Ashkenazim were able to share in the city's growth and well-being. The latter, for instance, participated indirectly by working for enterprises the Sephardim had already established earlier on, such as the tobacco and diamond industries.

That Jews soon established communal institutions such as schools, slaughter-houses, and synagogues within close proximity of each other, and thereby began to claim a Jewish space for themselves, is confirmed by Charles Ogier, who was the secretary to

the French Ambassador Claude de Mesmes. When the two Frenchmen stopped for a visit in Amsterdam on their way home to Paris in July of 1636, Ogier decided to explore what he referred to as the "Jewish section of the city." He visited two synagogues, although it is not clear from Ogier's journal which ones. Rachel Wischnitzer suspects that the first synagogue Ogier saw was *Beth Israel*, to which his journal devotes considerable space. He described the large *bimah*, the ark, the seating arrangements which ran along the walls, and the screened gallery reserved for female worshipers. Furthermore, he noticed the simple floor-plan and the interior's modesty with respect to decoration. He then tells us of his visit to the *alia synagogue* (the "other synagogue"), most likely the nearby *Neve Shalom* prayer house, where he had the chance to meet Menasseh ben Israel. Ogier notes in his diary that he was eager to meet this famous rabbi, but unfortunately did not get to spend much time with him in the synagogue because he was apparently "annoyed by the presence of some ladies from Utrecht who had engaged the rabbi in conversation."[9]

In 1639, by which time approximately 1,000 Jews resided in Amsterdam, the three Spanish-Portuguese congregations merged into one community under the name *Talmud Tora* and initiated the construction of a new synagogue, again alongside the Houtgracht. This event marked the beginning of a visible and public presence of Jewish religious prayer houses in the Dutch urban landscape. The elegant building, the façade of which was designed in accordance with current aesthetic tastes, was inaugurated in October of the same year and would serve the community until 1675. Its Corinthian pilasters, its tall windows decorated with fashionable Dutch shutters, its parapet on the roof, and the fanlight over the balcony door rendered "die groβe Judenkirche," as von Zesen called it in his guidebook, a product of its time.[10] It is this synagogue that saw the excommunication of both Uriel da Costa (1640) and Baruch Spinoza (1656), as well as the short but intense messianic fervor around Sabbatai Zevi in the 1660s.

Not until the 1670s, however, did the *Joodse Buurt* in Amsterdam begin to acquire a permanent place in Dutch cultural and religious life and obtain an international reputation by the construction of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue, also known as the Esnoga, and the Ashkenazic Great Shul. These monumental and easily identifiable synagogues became public markers of the prosperity, sense of comfort, and prestige the

city's Jewish communities enjoyed during these years. Built opposite each other on the Houtgracht within the time span of only five years, they illustrate better than anything else how well these two communities were accepted in Amsterdam and how much they had become an integral, recognized, and legitimate part of the social and religious panorama of the city.[11] Their emergence is particularly striking when one considers the modesty and caution with which other religious minorities kept out of the public realm, particularly Dutch Catholics, who worshiped in so-called *schuilkerken* or concealed chapels. While Catholics, due to strong anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiments, gathered in such private homes as the 1661 *Ons Lieve Heer op Zolder* – Our Dear Lord in the Attic – the Jews erected two elaborate and grand structures that were to form, according to historian David P. Cohen Paraira, "the heart of the most imposing synagogue complex in the world."[12]

A number of factors explain the construction of large synagogues in Amsterdam at this time, the first of which concerns the communities' rising prosperity. This period was truly a golden age, not merely for the Republic's colonial trade and commercial power during most of the seventeenth century, but also for Jewish religious, cultural, and institutional life. It saw the emergence of Jewish schools and printing houses, of poetry and plays by such writers as Daniel Levi de Barrios and Joseph Penso de la Vega, and the Yiddish bi-weekly *Dinstagisje en Frajtagisje Koerant*; a growing industry in diamonds, tobacco, and minting, and the first publication of a Yiddish Bible (1679) and a Jewish newspaper, the *Gazeta de Amsterdam*.[13] That both communities enjoyed a certain level of financial security by the 1670s is reflected, for instance, in the number of Sephardic bank account holders at the Amsterdam Bank, which rose from 89 in 1641 (6 percent of the total number of accounts) to 265 in 1671 (13 percent), an increase that was even more remarkable as the number of gentile bank account holders actually decreased in the late 1660s.[14] This accumulation of capital resulted from the intensification of commercial and financial activities, a process which benefited the community at large as the *imposta* – a tax imposed on the import and export of goods – enriched communal funds. Jews, in short, decided to build on a large scale because they could afford it.

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Moreover, the growing number of Jews residing in the city demanded larger synagogues. Whereas in the 1630s the Sephardic community consisted of about 900 members and the Ashkenazim numbered around 100, in the early 1670s this had multiplied significantly to approximately 3,200 Sephardim and 1,800 Ashkenazim.[15] The male contingent of these 5,000 Jews – a number that was likely to increase in the years to come – needed to be provided with spacious and respectable synagogues. Most important, however, was the overall feeling of safety from persecution and the desire to proudly display a heritage that in Catholic Spain had been strictly forbidden and concealed. Although not all Jews residing in Amsterdam at this time had come to Holland for religious reasons – if so, then leaving for an already firmly established *kehilla* such as the one in Venice would have made more sense – many did "return" to Judaism as a result of the Republic's prevailing intellectual and religious liberties. Constructing grand synagogues gave expression to these sentiments and allowed Jewish worship to be transformed from an activity largely directed inwards to one that incorporated public representation into its celebration of Judaism. As for the Ashkenazim, they merely desired the continuation of a Jewish milieu that had structured their lives for generations, of which synagogue building constituted a fundamental dimension. That the relatively liberal Dutch environment and overall well-being of the German-Jewish community allowed for a much more open articulation of Jewish religious traditions only stimulated the desire to do so. In short, giving architectural expression to Jewish religion and culture was thus largely a reflection of and a response to the socio-economic and political conditions in which Jews lived.

On May 1, 1670, after five Ashkenazim had received permission from local authorities to begin the construction of their new synagogue "freely on the public road,"[16] the cornerstone of the German-Jewish synagogue was laid. Granted a 16,000 guilder loan from the city magistrate – almost half of the 33,621 guilders it would cost to finish the project – the community hired a Christian contractor by the name of Elias Bouman (literally "Elias the Builder"), a master mason who would also play an important role in the construction of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue. Daniel Stalpaert, the city architect responsible for Amsterdam's 1669 *Oosterkerk* (East Church), provided the design: an

elegant brick building with a white trim that was, in the words of an early eighteenth-century Dutch observer, "especially worthwhile seeing for those curious admirers who appreciate buildings, and who are desirous to observe all of the *most prominent buildings* in Amsterdam."[17] The structure, which offered 399 seats for men and 368 for women, displayed three rows of Renaissance windows, the lower three of which were straight-headed, the middle row was tall and round-headed, and the upper row was square. The main entrance, placed in a columnar portal, accentuated the tripartite vertical division of the façade, the effect of which was intensified by four narrow pilasters. The building, flanked on one side by the *mikveh* [ritual bath] and on the other by the residence of the caretaker, presented what architectural historian Carol Krinsky called "a picture of stately dignity among the nearby low and narrow gabled houses of the seventeenth century."[18] Dedicated on March 25, 1671, the Great Shul soon required additional accommodations due to the influx of Ashkenazim into the capitol. The structure, which today houses the Jewish Historical Museum, was enlarged with the so-called *obbene shul* in 1685, a *dritte shul* in 1700, and a *neie shul* in 1750.

The expansion of the *Joodse Buurt* reached its zenith with the construction of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in 1671, which was the largest in the world by the time it was dedicated four years later. An impressive 36 x 28 x 19.5 meters in size, the Esnoga was a majestic square structure that towered over the surrounding buildings, dominating the Jewish neighborhood from almost every angle. This sharp contrast between the synagogue and the lower buildings enclosing it was intensified visually by the buttresses, pilasters, and tall, arched windows of the synagogue, which made the building seem even higher and more impressive.[19] To a local Dutch observer the new Spanish-Portuguese synagogue, which accommodated 1227 men and 440 women, constituted a "very graceful building so pleasing to the eye, that it is a delight to look at,"[20] a sentiment shared by contemporary and recent visitors alike. It was also the first known synagogue that included women's galleries as an organic part of the initial design.[21] The Esnoga, which cost an amazing 186,000 guilders, was built by Elias Bouman in a Protestant Baroque style, a popular aesthetic form during the late 1600s and early 1700s that expressed in classical architectural terms "the forthright character and sobriety of the Dutch Calvinists,

with none of the tumultuous, overflowing grandeur of the baroque of the Catholic south."[22] Built in red-brown brick, its interior and exterior displayed plain geometric and symmetrical patterns in the forms of Tuscan columns, pilasters, and tall square windows. This strict adherence to symmetry was considered an important requirement in the classical tradition, so much so, that the north side of the building was given a door, just like the one on the south side, for the sole reason of creating an aesthetic balance. The fact that this door would be blocked by the bench for the *Parnasim* (elected officials) behind it was of much less concern than a consistently applied symmetrical pattern. This desire for balanced proportions found equal expression in the synagogue's façade, which was divided by pilasters into a wide central section, with narrower sections on each side. An inscription in gilt Hebrew lettering, taken from Psalm 5, verse 8, and distinctly placed above the stone entrance, read: "In the abundance of Thy loving kindness will I come into Thy house." The date that accompanies this inscription, the year 1672, suggests that the construction of the Esnoga experienced significant delays as it was inaugurated three years later on August 2, 1675.[23]

The restrained classical style, which found visual expression in the design of the Town Hall on the Dam square (1665), the *Oosterkerk* (1669-1671), and the Marine Arsenal (1655-1656), was closely connected to the newly acquired wealth of the ruling elites.[24] Its monumentality, the sparing use of decoration, and the harmony among the architectural elements signaled prestige and an elegant, respectable lifestyle. However, building the Esnoga in this architectural tradition afforded the Spanish-Portuguese community not merely an opportunity to visually communicate to the public its participation in and loyalty to Dutch economic and cultural progress. It simultaneously allowed for the incorporation of historical elements. Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem proved to be a particular source of inspiration, the design of which found resonance in the synagogue's representation. Its outwardly slanting buttresses, for example, were identical to the small-scale model on display at Juda Leon's home in the late 1660s.[25] While conforming to contemporary aesthetic taste, the Esnoga integrated into its design biblical components that produced not simply a classicist building, but an identifiably Jewish structure built in the classicist tradition. The widespread attention the Spanish-Portuguese

synagogue received from gentile and Jew alike since its inauguration in 1675 can be partially explained by this appealing blend of a highly popular architectural form with Jewish connotations.

By the mid-1670s Amsterdam's Jewish neighborhood was comprised of two grand synagogues, offices for the *Parnasim,* the communities' slaughter houses, residences for the rabbis, and a number of Jewish schools, gambling- and coffee houses, *mikvot* (ritual baths) and printing facilities, all of which, contends historian Jozeph Michman, "gave the neighborhood the quality of a Jewish center not seen anywhere else in Europe at this time."[26] The creation of this network of social, religious, and cultural organizations in which Jews socialized daily rendered it a space that asserted and cultivated a form of Jewish self-identification. Indeed, the semiological landscape that gave visual expression to this budding network constantly reminded Jews of their religious heritage, particularly with regard to the biblical affiliations inherent in the Esnoga, and affirmed a strong affiliation with Judaism. The *Joodse Buurt* thus instilled the perception – among Jews and non-Jews alike – that Jews formed a distinct group among the city's cosmopolitan population. Furthermore, the Jewish district reflected the transition from an observance that had mostly taken place in the private sphere of upper rooms, warehouses, or inconspicuous synagogues to one openly practiced in the public realm. The privacy in which Jews had practiced their freedom of conscience had gradually unveiled itself to the external viewer who could now behold the freedom of public worship.

The construction of visible Jewish prayer houses on prominent sites extended an invitation to "outsiders" to come and observe the fruits of religious freedom. And gentiles, in increasing numbers, did. Sightseeing in the Jewish neighborhood became part of the seventeenth century tourist agenda. Jewish communal leaders – although the Sephardim much more than the Ashkenazim – generally favored this growing interest in the synagogue. They encouraged gentiles to access its domain by attempting to foster an elegant and respectful image of the congregation. The historian Yosef Kaplan found a number of special regulations introduced as early as the late 1640s intended to create a sense of earnestness and decorum that would please Christian guests:

> In contrast to the policy of segregation that characterized many Jewish communities in Europe, the Portuguese community of Amsterdam showed great openness toward Christian visitors and even stated in a special regulation adopted in September 1649 that 'the gentlemen who sit behind the *tebah* [reader's platform] will be permitted to offer a seat to any man [who might visit the synagogue] without disturbing the congregation of worshippers.' Since this regulation had previously mentioned that 'no man shall rise from his seat in order to greet *goyim* [sic] without permission of their lordship of the Mahamad,' we may conclude that its intention was to permit non-Jewish visitors to sit in the synagogue, on condition that this was arranged in an orderly manner, by having the worshippers behind the *tebah* function as ushers when necessary, as in a theatre![27]

By making visitors feel welcome, Jews could personally demonstrate their cultured behavior and good taste, thereby inviting curious Christians to rethink the validity of traditional stereotypes. Replacing "improper" codes of conduct with ones gentiles could recognize and appreciate thus diminished the possibility of rejection. Taking pinches of snuff on Shabbat, for instance, became inappropriate behavior as it aroused "great reproach not only among the members of our nation but also among the *goyim* who are present in the place, who whisper about these things and others which constitute a desecration of [the name of] heaven." These communal regulations suggest not only that curious Christians visited these Jewish religious spaces; they also imply that Sephardim took great pains to convince them of their moral behavior and "worthiness" by presenting an orderly and dignified Jewish service. The British traveler Thomas Nugent, at least, was convinced. Visiting Amsterdam in the 1740s, he spent his Saturday morning attending Shabbat services and was quite impressed: "The Jewish synagogue . . . is well worth being seen by the curious traveler; which pleasure he may have every Saturday. One may understand the Jewish rites and ceremonies better by seeing a synagogue, and being present in time of worship, than by the tedious dry study of all the books in the world: the method of acquiring knowledge by the eye is easy and pleasant. The Jews, in their synagogues, are civil enough to strangers."[28] By observing Jews within their own domain, one might actually learn something.

As long as Jews kept the public display of Judaism within the boundaries of the *Joodse Buurt*, they were not considered a threat to the established order. "All kinds of sentiments are tolerated in Amsterdam," contended the Dutch author Casper Commelin in his 1694 *Beschryvinge van Amsterdam* [Description of Amsterdam], "and no one is forced to abandon his persuasions, provided they remain quiet and don't cause any public disputes, nor find their way in any annoying literature."[29] In practice this meant that "when street peddlers . . . sell their merchandise within the vicinity of the churches, the burgomasters [would] contact the *Parnasim* to have the situation improved, for as long as it lasts."[30] Trying to keep potential tensions between Christians and Jews to a minimum, the more mercantilist-minded city authorities granted Jews an unusual number of privileges, on the condition that they would not "provoke" the Christian population. Indeed, local officials gladly accepted the communities' self-organization and self-sufficiency, reassured that a powerful Jewish leadership, whose scope was defined by communal concerns such as synagogue worship, education, charity, and censorship, "would not be meddled with . . . and could keep its subjects restrained and disciplined."[31] Everybody knew and was allowed to know that this part of the city was the domain of the local Jewish community where they could freely worship, build, and sip coffee, be it within certain physical parameters. That the construction of monumental synagogues in the early 1670s occurred without considerable conflict should therefore come as no surprise, as it took place within the Jews' own locality and therefore did not pose a threat to the preeminence of Christian churches nor to the Protestant status quo.

However, there are many signs that these communal boundaries were becoming increasingly blurred over the course of the seventeenth century. A number of Jews who had gained significant wealth and influence in the non-Jewish world began to take up residence in gentile upper class neighborhoods. Manuel Baron de Belmonte, for instance, a powerful Sephardic Jew locally known as Isaac Nuñes, moved to the aristocratic Herengracht at a considerable distance from the *Joodse Buurt*.[32] As living in the Jewish district had always been voluntary, there was no obstruction to moving into Christian residential areas. Moreover, the "for as long as it lasts" comment in the earlier quote suggests the disciplinary actions of the *Parnasim* not to have peddlers spread out too

close to where it would be "bothersome" to Christians, had only a temporary effect. The absence of serious consequences might have encouraged the Jewish peddler to roam freely through the city, where he interacted with the locals.

Skilled or learned Jews, too, began to venture into occupational realms traditionally closed to them, thereby increasing their visibility and contact with the non-Jewish world. While the majority of guilds did not accept Jews, the latter did receive permission to enter those public commercial domains in which they did not compete with Christians, such as the brokers', physicians', surgeons', apothecaries', and book dealers' guild.[33] Between 1655 and 1685, for instance, eleven Sephardim from Amsterdam received a doctorate in medicine from the University of Leiden, a number that increased in the following decades.[34] Even in the realm of "publick Imployment," as one contemporary British traveler called it, a certain flexibility was permissible. Whereas one visitor reported in 1699 that "wer ein öffentliches Amt haben will, der muß ein Reformirter sein" [whoever wants a position in public service must be Reformed], a British account observed that exceptions were not uncommon: "[N]one but Calvinists must aspire to publick Imployments; tho' several have attain'd thereto, who have been of contrary Opinions; but that was either by Inadvertency, or else because they were well satisfy'd in the abilities of the Persons."[35] Whereas this observer does not specifically refer to Jews, he does imply that the boundaries between Calvinists and non-Calvinists were at the very least not strictly enforced.

The realm of theater, too, suggests Jews increasingly moved into Dutch public space, as increasing numbers attended plays performed in the city theaters. When around the turn of the century a small group of Sephardim requested permission from the local authorities to perform Spanish-language plays in the Amsterdam theater on Wednesday evenings, their request was denied not because of anti-Jewish sentiments, but because this meant Jewish visitors would stop coming to theaters on other days of the week.[36] Around the turn of the century Jews were thus eager producers as well as consumers of culture in- and outside the parameters of their own neighborhood.

The entry into Dutch cultural and economic affairs suggests that Jews were beginning to feel at home in this small seafaring nation, a development that oftentimes

bothered foreign visitors. A considerable number of German and French observers reprimanded the Dutch authorities in their travelogues for their tolerance of "deviants". Many, for instance, could not help but admire the Jews' synagogues as architectural gems but they disapproved of what these buildings represented, namely the community's sense of security, prosperity, and growing participation in the Republic's economic and cultural life. The majority of German, French, and English travel accounts speak favorably of the Esnoga and the Great Shul, but they describe the Jews as untrustworthy crooks and religious fanatics.[37] Foreign observers, in other words, had difficulty acknowledging a link between Jews on the one hand, and beautifully built monumental architecture on the other, a relationship many considered implausible, even suspect. The only logical explanation for the Dutch authorities' "erratic" behavior, then, had to be their morally questionable preference of commercial profit over religious faith – an accusation that was not entirely false.[38]

For those who had matured in a relatively tolerant and mercantilist Dutch culture the presence of a Jewish neighborhood and of conspicuous, freestanding synagogues became a familiar part of the urban fabric and a common sight to see. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources – such as poems, travelogues, and paintings – reveal that Dutch gentiles frequently visited the open-air markets in the *Joodse Buurt* and strolled through the streets when on their way to the nearby port. Contemporary artists such as Romeyn de Hooghe, Pieter Persoij, Balthazar Bernaerts, Emanuel de Witte, and Joost van den Vondel expressed highly positive attitudes towards the Jews, lauding the Esnoga in their work as "a masterpiece," as "the glory of the Amstel [river]."[39] While the majority of locals never stepped inside a synagogue, and while some Christians undoubtedly grumbled about them, they grew increasingly accustomed to these religious edifices and to a Jewish public presence. The lack of a Dutch literary tradition of demonization and the growing access of Jews into Dutch public domains only confirm this view.

It is true that Dutch tolerance of religious minorities during the seventeenth century was based more on economic concerns than on heart-felt sympathies toward the Jews and that we should avoid the romanticizing of Dutch-Jewish relations. The toleration debate is complex and has been discussed elsewhere.[40] The point here, rather, is

that the emergence of recognizably Jewish structures in the city center began to familiarize the public with a Jewish presence. Indeed, the centrality, vibrancy, and voluntary nature of the *Joodse Buurt* exposed gentiles and Jews alike to an alternative reality and advanced confessional toleration as it extended the limits of what was considered acceptable within the public realm. From this perspective, urban architecture served as a vehicle for a paradoxical progress toward tolerance.

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Notes

[1] Mokum has become a popular nickname for Amsterdam, used primarily in informal settings. The word originates from the Hebrew word for place, מקום or *Makom*. While it initially referred to the Jewish district only, over time the name Mokum has come to represent the city as a whole.
[2] Edward Brown, *A brief account of some travels in divers parts of Europe viz Hungaria, Servia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Thessaly, Austria, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, and Friuli: through a great part of Germany, and the Low-Countries . . . /* (London: Printed by T. R. for Benj. Tooke, 1673): 100.

[3] Jonathan I. Israel, "De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden tot Omstreeks 1750: Demografie en Economische Activiteit," in J.C.H. Blom's *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1995), 97.

[4] Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 82.

[5] The synagogue of Beth Israel was opened in 1619. Beth Ya'akob, most likely named after Jacob Tirado, in whose house in Vlooyenburg the congregation had first met, acquired a house at the Houtgracht in ca. 1614. The Vlooyenburg and Houtgracht area was attractive to Jews as it was located in walking distance from Amsterdam's port and therefore convenient for Jewish merchants involved in international trade.

[6] Sir William Brereton, *Travels in Holland, the United Provinces, England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1634-1635*, ed. by E. Hawkins (London, 1844), 61, 68.

[7] A number of historians, among others Yosef Kaplan and Hubert P.H. Nusteling, have argued that the number of Jews in Amsterdam in the early 1630s numbered approximately 1,000, the majority of whom were Spanish-Portuguese Jews. This number increased to roughly 5,000 in 1675, 3,200 of whom were Sephardim and 1,800 Ashkenazim. For a recent demographic study, see Hubert P.H. Nusteling's "The Jews in the Republic of the United Provinces: Origin, Numbers and Dispersion," in *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500-2000)*, eds. Jonathan Israel and Reinier Salverda (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 43-57.

[8] Philip von Zesen, *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: M. W. Doornik, 1664), 272.

[9] Wischnitzer, 83.

[10] Ibid., 86.

[11] Yoseph Kaplan, "De Joden in de Republiek tot omstreeks 1750: Religieus, Cultureel en Sociaal Leven," in *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland*, ed. by J.C.H. Blom et al. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1995), 139.

[12] David P. Cohen Paraira, "A Jewel in the City: The Architectural History of the Portuguese-Jewish Synagogue," in *The Esnoga: A Monument to Portuguese-Jewish Culture*, ed. by Judith C. E. Belinfante et al. (Amsterdam: D'ARTS, 1991), 44.

[13] See Mozes Heiman Gans, *Memorbook: History of Dutch Jewry from the Renaissance to 1940* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning n.v., 1971), 145. David de Castro Tartaas' *Gazeta de Amsterdam* appeared from 1675 to 1690 and was one of the first periodicals ever published by Jews.

[14] See Jozeph Michman, Hartog Beem, and Dan Michman, eds., *Pinkas: Geschiedenis van de Joodse Gemeenschap in Nederland* (Ede: Kluwer Algemene Boeken, 1985), 25.
[15] Nusteling, 53.

[16] David Moses Sluys tells us that in December 1669 permission was requested to "found a new synagogue . . . not hidden in an alley, but free on the public road" by five Jews: Joseph Abrahams (known among his contemporaries as R. Joseph Polak), Nathaniel Cohen, Zadok Salomons, Isack Cohen, and Alexander Barents. See Sluys, *De Oudste Synagogen der Hoogduitsch-Joodsche Gemeente te Amsterdam, 1635-1671* (Amsterdam: Joachimsthal's Stoomdrukkerij, 1921), 17. Sluys's 1924 publication *De Groote Synagoge als Bezienswaardigheid. Bijdrage tot de Kennis der Geschiedenis van de Groote Synagoge der Nederl. Israël. Hoofdsynagoge te Amsterdam*, also elaborates on this event.

[17] This anonymous Dutch observer entitled his book, *Beknopte Beschryving van alle de voornaamste Gebouwen der wydvermaarde Koopstad Amsterdam, Cierlyk in 't Koper afgebeeld, inzonderheyd van het Stadhuys, waar by ook gevoegd is, een Verklaaring van het Schilderwerk, boven de groote Zaal ,alles ordentlyk byeen gebragt, ten dienste van de genene die begeerig zijn om de gebouwen der gemelde Stad te bezigtigen* (Amsterdam: Dirk Schouten, 1713).

[18] Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 389.

[19] Paraira in *The Esnoga*, 48.

[20] See *Beknopte Beschrijving van alle de voornaamste Gebouwen*. This volume, unfortunately, lacks page numbers.

[21] See Brian de Breffny, *The Synagogue* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), 137. Most women's sections up to this time were not part of the main hall of worship, and were either tucked away in annexes or basements, or added on in the form of galleries at

a later date. In seventeenth-century Amsterdam, however, it became common for women to accompany their husbands to Shabbat services – a custom most likely adopted from Christian practice and reflected in the incorporation of women's galleries alongside the northern and southern walls of the synagogue.

[22] Ibid., 136.

[23] 1672 was the year the Esnoga was supposed to be ready, but a destructive storm and the increasing tensions the city experienced as a result of the international conflict between France and England halted construction work.

[24] Paraira in *The Esnoga*, 54 - 55.

[25] A number of foreign observers were suspicious of these design choices. The buttresses in particular raised suspicions as they reminded some gentiles of citadels. A recurring story in late-seventeenth century travel literature, for instance, explains the construction of the Amsterdam Esnoga as an act of conspiracy or malevolence against the Dutch authorities; rich and powerful Jews were secretly building a large fortress, disguised as a synagogue, in order to take over the city. It recounts how local officials expressed growing concerns during the construction process and ordered the Jews to finish their building project early – which supposedly explained why the synagogue had a flat roof. These kinds of interpretations were formulated primarily by German and French visitors, who had difficulty reconciling the sophisticated and beautiful monumentality of the synagogues with Jews. See, among others, B. F.'s *Voyages Historiques de l'Europe*, which was translated into German by August Bohse (1661-1730) under the title of *Curieuse Reisen durch Europa* and into English under the title of *A New Description of Holland and the Rest of the United Provinces In General. Containing Their Government, Laws, Religion, Policy, and Strength; Their Customs, Manners, and Riches; Their Trade to the Indies, etc*.; Johann Jacob Schudt, *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten . . . /* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1714).

[26] Michman in *Pinkas*, 53.

[27] Kaplan, "*Gente Política*," in *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, 27.

[28] Thomas Nugent, *Travels through Germany. Containing Observations on customs, manners, religion, government, commerce, arts, and antiquities. With a particular account of the courts of Mecklenburg. In a series of letters to a friend . . . /* (London: printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, 1768), 111.

[29] Casper Commelin, *Beschryvinge van Amsterdam, Zynde een Naukeurige Verhandelinge van desselfs eerste Oorspronk uyt der Heeren van Amsterl en Amstellant,*

haar Vergrootingen, Rykdom, en Wyze van Regeeringe, tot den Jare 1691 (Amsterdam: Aart Dirksz. Oossaan, 1694), 236.

[30] D.M. Sluys, *Beelden uit het Leven der Hoogduitsch-Joodse Gemeente te Amsterdam in het Begin der 18e Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger, 1925), 7.

[31] Sluys, 7.

[32] For more on Isaac Nuñes see Mozes Heiman Gans, *Memorbook: History of Dutch Jewry from the Renaissance to 1940* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning n. v., 1971), 117.

[33] City officials did exclude Jews from other guilds, mainly because of their own interest in keeping them from spreading their political and economic sphere of influence. However, Daniel Swetschinski argues that "guild restrictions hardly ever affected the most important spheres of the economic life of Amsterdam's Jews. Where they did, the restrictions were lifted or modified. The attitudes of the guilds was formed more by fear of competition than by Church-inspired anti-Jewish sentiments, and their generally discriminatory stance affected non-native Christians as well as Jews, though admittedly less radically." See Daniel M. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000), 21-22.

[34] Kaplan, "De Joden in de Republiek tot omstreeks 1750: Religieus, Cultureel en Sociaal Leven," in *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland*, 156.

[35] *A New Description of Holland, and the Rest of the United Provinces in General: Containing Their Government, Laws, Religion, Policy, and Strength; Their Customs, Manners, and Riches; Their Trade to the Indies, etc. Their Fishery and Bank, with a Particular Account of Amsterdam, Hague, Rotterdam, and the other Principal Cities of Holland* (London: Printed for H. Rhodes, at the Star, the corner of Bride-Lane, in Fleet Street, 1701), 50.

[36] Kaplan, 159.

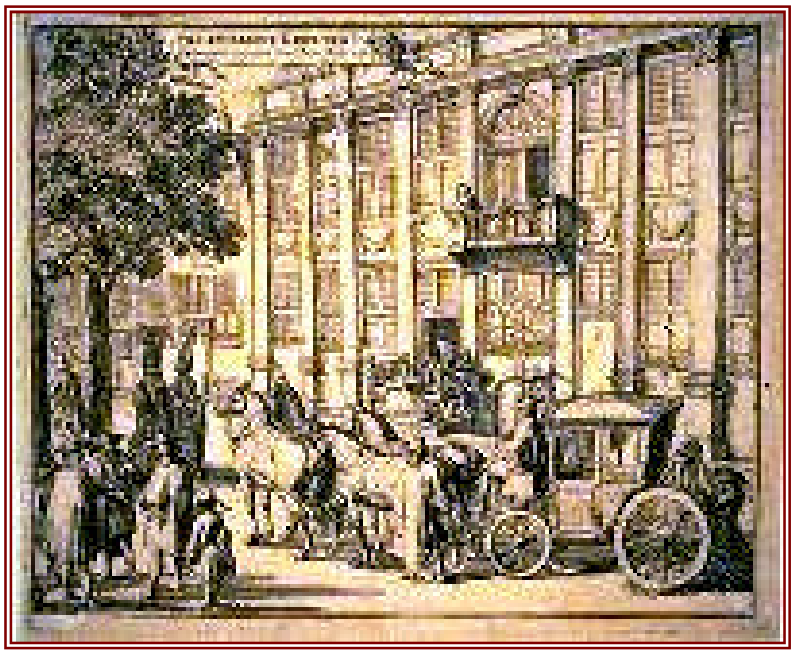
[37] William Carr, for instance, spoke very highly of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue during a visit in the late 1680s, but he warned his readers to be careful of the dirty way Jews do business, which "is a great mystery of Iniquity [that] inricheth one man and ruins a hundred." He elaborates extensively on the process of buying and selling of "Actions of the Company" at the Dam Square, the Exchange, and "in the Coledges or Clubs of the Jews," the price of which was apparently influenced by "Crafty Jews and others [who] Connived to Coine bad newes to make the Action fall, and good newes to raise them, the which craft [sic!] of doing at Amsterdam is not taken notice of, which is much to be wondered at, in such a wise Government as Amsterdam is, for it is a certain trueth they many times spread scandalous reports touching the affaires of State, which passe amongst

the Ignorant for truth." Jews might have a splendid and state-of-the-art synagogue, they were still not to be trusted. See William Carr, *The Travellours Guide and Historians Faithful Companion: Giving an Account of the most Remarkable things and matters Relating to the Religion, Government, Custom, Manners, Laws, Politics, Companies, Trade, &c. in all the principal Kingdoms, States, and Provinces, not only in Europe, but other parts of the World . . . /* (London: for Eben Tracy, 1695), 54-55.

[38] One of the most outspoken and well-known examples of this kind of criticism is provided by Johann Jacob Schudt, who accused the local authorities of allowing an "allzugroβe Judenfreiheit" [an excessive freedom for the Jews] in Amsterdam. Indeed Holland at large, he argued, "has reached the point of favoring small profits made in the name of God over conscience and Christian well-being." See *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten . . ./* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1714), 281. Many other contemporaries, such as Thomas Penson, Gregorio Leti, John Northleigh, Johann Peter Willebrandt, and John Moore, expressed similar sentiments in their travel accounts, although their overall tone was considerably less aggressive.

[39] Romeyn de Hooghe lauded the new synagogue in a unique series of prints produced in 1675. Published in a volume entitled *Sermoes que pregarão os doctos ingenios do K. K. de Taalmud Torah des ta cidade de Amsterdam*, de Hooghe's engravings served as illustrations to the sermons given during its week-long inauguration. De Hooghe complemented his engravings with a poem that extolled the new synagogue: "This is the school of Law, the Jews' house of prayer; A builder's masterpiece, the glory of the Amstel and the Y; This church dedicated to God, Fears no coercion, nor pain nor death; This honorable tribe of Judae, let your shoots blossom; The growth of burghers will only increase the power of this land." For a detailed description of De Hooghe's work see D. H. de Castro, *De Synagoge der Portugees-Israëlitische Gemeente te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1950), 34-35.

[40] For an excellent study of Dutch toleration see Joris van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).



Coenen Snyder Fig. 1

Coenen Snyder Fig. 2

Coenen Snyder Fig. 3

Coenen Snyder Fig. 4