

Abstracts 18th Contact Day Jewish History on the Low Countries, 12 May 2026

A life story from the 17th century in his own voice (discurso de sua vida): Francisco Cardoso Ortiz or Abraham Cardoso, a Jew from Bayonne, and his transcontinental travels

José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim

On June 22, 1640, in Madrid, the Portuguese Jew Francisco Cardoso, also known as Abraham Cardoso, presented himself voluntarily to the inquisitors. He was born in Saint-Esprit-lès-Bayonne, where many Portuguese Jews lived. His testimony is included in the lengthy trial against his father, Baltazar Rodrigues Cardoso, brought by the Toledo Inquisition and serves as incriminating evidence. Over twelve folios, Francisco describes himself as a member of the Iberian diaspora, embarking on extensive journeys.

Francisco came from Brazil, more specifically from the Dutch Paraíba, but traveling through Holland and France, with the explicit purpose of reconciling with the Catholic Church. The most interesting aspect of this account is the revelation of the ease with which he and his relatives moved between Spain and areas where Jewish communities existed, such as, in addition to southwestern France, Livorno, Amsterdam, and Morocco (Tetuán and Marrakech), facilitating business in financial centers as important as Medina del Campo.

Baptized at the behest of the Franciscans in Paraíba in 1637, he entered the Iberian Peninsula through Pamplona. His immersion in the Catholic world entails, as proof of veracity, the denunciation of relatives and other coreligionists, who continue to invest in kinship networks between Spain and southwestern France (especially Peyrehorade), betting on endogamy and inclusion in the Jewish world. As in the case of other converts, he also ends his testimony with a small literary work – a sonnet – attesting to the falsity of the old religious world and the excellence of the new one.

After all, this “life discourse,” which becomes a Catholic self-confession, reveals what is paradigmatic in this fluid universe of people of Iberian origin who, in the 17th century, had a Jewish background. Our intention, using this life discourse, is to reflect on the viability of these business nuclei based on kinship and identity ethos, and on the invectives to which they were subjected, arising from the erosion of the political-religious (the Inquisition) or social (the escapes within the network) onslaught.

From Pinhas to Youssouf: The fascinating travels of a Jewish family of “Muslim” performers in mid-nineteenth-century Europe

Hilde Greefs & Anne Winter

In this paper we would like to present our ongoing research on the life history of Algerian-born Jewish performer Pinhas Ben Ezra and his family, who travelled around France, Belgium, the Netherlands and England in the 1840s and 1850s, performing Orientalist dance and music shows and keeping “Mauresque” coffeehouses. Although part of the Sephardic community of Algiers, Pinhas and his family posed as Muslim during their travels in Europe, going as far as adopting Islamic names – most likely to tap into Orientalist expectations of their bourgeois customers. Using various newspaper and archival sources in the countries they travelled and resided, this paper aims to reconstruct their fascinating life course and delve deeper into the social and cultural meaning of the

fluid uses of their religious identities in a time of complex colonial relations and Orientalist stereotypes.

Anticolonial Cold War Liberals: Sal Tas and Jacques de Kadt

Laura Almagor

Between the mid-1940s and the 1967 Six Day War, the Jewish place on both the imagined and the practical political spectrum between “East” and “West” was less strictly defined than it would become in later decades, when an intuitive linking between Jewishness and the West solidified in western mainstream societal and political thought. This paper explores these fluid postwar identities by probing several connections between Dutch-Jewish pre- and post-Holocaust self-identification, and the onset of decolonization. Via a focus on two public figures, journalist Sal (Salomon) Tas (1905-1976) and labour politician Jacques de Kadt (1897-1988), I argue that a very particular Jewish engagement with decolonization emerged in the liminal spaces these two men inhabited, and in which Dutch Jewishness, secularism, and a direct activist involvement with the battle against Dutch imperialism became connected. Moreover, Tas’ and De Kadt’s biographical-intellectual development connect the Holocaust and the post-1945 global decolonization process in unusual ways. Unselfconscious Jews before the Second World War, their Holocaust experiences enforced both men’s latent Jewishness as both a source of trauma and as political incentive. After the war, their reckoning with the recent treatment of Dutch Jews strengthened their longstanding personal investment in the Indonesian independence struggle. At the same time, Tas’ and De Kadt’s anticolonialism developed into a Cold War liberal engagement, not only with Indonesia, but also with French North Africa in the 1950s, culminating in an unequivocal support for the State of Israel by the time of the 1967 Six Day War, going against the grain of mainstream anticolonial sentiments of the day. By mapping Tas’ and De Kadt’s paradoxical ideological trajectories, this paper thus not only brings together Jewish and decolonial histories, but it also renders visible forms of invisible Jewishness by focusing on unselfconsciously Jewish socialists-turned-Cold-War-Liberals. As such, the paper also helps to both broaden and problematize Samuel Moyn’s recent analysis of the connection between Jews and Cold War Liberalism (*Liberalism against itself: Cold War intellectuals and the Making of Our Times*) as an almost exclusively North American affair, by introducing two Western European Jews into this analytical framework.

The Legacy of the Cambron Desecration: Imagery, Pilgrimage Sites and the Shaping of Medieval Identity and Community in the Low Countries

Hélène Muratore

This paper examines the material legacy, political and socio-economic consequences of the Cambron desecration of 1322, one of the first well-documented events of anti-Judaism in the Hainaut. In this chronicle, a converted Jewish man named Guillaume was accused of profanation against the figure of the Virgin Mary, piercing its painting by five times, in the Abbaye of Cambron near Mons (Belgium). The painting started bleeding shortly after the attack, and the phenomenon became a miracle. Despite being imprisoned and tortured for the act of profanity, Guillaume refused to confess to the crime he was accused of. Eventually, in 1326, through holy messengers, the man was found guilty and sentenced to burn on the stake, establishing the narrative of Jewish guilt.

Existing academic work on the subject concentrates mostly on the iconographic and literary production around this legendary story. Nevertheless, a multidisciplinary approach encompassing Art History, Archaeology and Socio-Economic History could highlight how this affair became an instrument of identity unity and political stabilization within a context of military and religious tensions.

This research explores the material productions of the legendary tale over a span of 730 years' time, looking at devotional publications, processions, paintings, engravings, medals, etc. Furthermore, the subsequent regional pilgrimage cult of the Virgin Mary resulting in a lasting economy of devotion, as well as its impact on the ensuing persecution and expulsions of Jews in the region over the centuries will be discussed. In this paper I will argue that on one hand this historical event reinforced local identity and community around the Marian devotion. On the other hand, I will aim to show how the story of Guillaume becomes a means of delegitimizing otherness during a period of confessional fracture and territorial reorganization.

Anti-Jewish images in the OLV Church in Aarschot

Lieve Teugels

In the Notre Dame Church in Aarschot in Flanders, several images are attested that have been interpreted as anti-Jewish. These are, first, to be found in carved wooden objects in the choir, on so-called misericords, and second, possibly also on stained glass windows that historically belonged to the church. As to the misericords, this pertains to images that are similar to a *Judensau* (an offensive image of a female pig surrounded by Jews), featuring fable animals, dogs and pigs in the presence of Jewish figures. The same choir also includes a woodcut of an Ecclesia and Synagoga pair, a known anti-Jewish, supersessionist, image. In previous studies I have investigated the medieval *Judensau* imagery in its historical and iconographic context. I will now investigate why such imagery is specifically present in this church, as the *Judensau* imagery is, rather, typical for German-speaking regions. My hypothesis is that the fact that Aarschot was under Habsburg rule when the church was built, may explain the abundance of anti-Jewish images and especially the *Judensau*-like imagery. It is attested that a very influential Habsburg figure, Guillaume de Croÿ, the teacher of the later Charles V, commissioned some stained-glass windows to the Church. At least one of these, depicting the slaughter of the paschal lamb, may also have an anti-Jewish intention. These stained glass windows are now relocated in a church in England. An excellent study of the choir stalls in Aarschot, from an art-historical perspective, has already been written by Christel Theunissen (*Koorbanken in Brabant*, 2017). She has not specifically investigated the anti-Jewish content of the misericords, however. The stain-glass windows have, as far as I know, not yet been studied from the perspective of their possible anti-Jewish content.

“The Jewish Neighbourhood”, creating different Jewish identities on Amsterdam’s streets

Julia van der Krieke

This paper examines the reciprocal relationship between Jewish identity and urban neighbourhoods in Amsterdam from the late nineteenth century to the post-war period. Adopting a comparative neighbourhood perspective, it analyses four historically Jewish areas—Waterlooplein and its surrounding streets, including the Rapenburg area, De Plantage, Amsterdam East, and Amsterdam

South—to show how Jewish inhabitants shaped distinct neighbourhood identities and how these urban environments, in turn, influenced the ways Jewishness was lived, expressed, and remembered.

Drawing on urban history, spatial theory, and Jewish Studies, the paper conceptualises neighbourhoods not simply as residential settings but as lived, social, and symbolic spaces. Jewish identity is approached as situational and locally embedded, shaped by class position, political orientation, degrees of secularisation, religious affiliation, and everyday engagement with streets, markets, and public squares. Particular attention is paid to political cultures, family and kinship networks, and forms of attachment to place.

The Waterlooplein area, including the adjacent Rapenburg neighbourhood, long associated with working-class Jewish life, street-based economies, and political activism, is contrasted with the more bourgeois, culturally oriented environment of De Plantage. Amsterdam East and Amsterdam South, products of urban expansion and social mobility, reveal shifting patterns of Jewish settlement, integration, and identity formation. These patterns include changing relationships to religious institutions, secular organisations, and new communal infrastructures. The notions of “Jewish streets” and “Jewish squares” are used as analytical tools to explore how Jewish presence became spatially concentrated, socially meaningful, and symbolically obilizati within the city.

By foregrounding neighbourhoods as key mediating structures between broader societal transformations—such as mobilization and political mobilization—and everyday lived experience, this paper challenges monolithic notions of “the Jewish neighbourhood.” It contributes to Jewish Studies of the Low Countries by highlighting local variation, spatial experience, and the constitutive role of urban space in the formation of Jewish histories and identities.

Hakhshara in the Netherlands: Jewish Youth Between Hope, Flight, and Self- Fulfilment

Nina Zellerhoff

For many Jews in Germany, especially in the 1930s, their Hakhshara¹ continued in the Netherlands. Since the Nazis came to power in 1933, more and more Jews had come to the Netherlands from Germany as their political situation worsened and educational opportunities became increasingly scarce. During this time, many young people joined Jewish youth associations and pushed to join HeHalutz. As demand for Hakhshara in Germany soon could no longer be met due to a lack of places HeHalutz sought opportunities to establish Hakhshara programs abroad. This was partly because foreign countries offered Jews protection from Nazi oppression, at least temporarily.

This proposed contribution aims to show what motivated young people to participate in Hakhshara in the Netherlands using selected biographies of participants as examples. It will provide an overview of the training system up to 1940. The focus will be on young people who grew up in the Netherlands and accepted the Hakhshara offer there as early as 1918, as well as on those who came from neighboring countries, especially after 1933.

This group will be used as an example to show whether the Netherlands was merely a “stopover” on their way to realizing their dreams in Erez Israel or if their stay in the Netherlands had a different significance. The subject of my proposal is part of a dissertation project based at the University of Potsdam under the direction of Prof. Dr. Miriam Rürup. The project examines and presents the history of Hakhshara in the Netherlands and highlights the origins and its connections to the education of Jewish youth within the framework of Hakhshara in the former German Reich and the

Netherlands. Transnational networks, particularly within the Jewish youth movement, are central to this study, which is why participants and organizations are at its foreground.

The stranger as catalyst: Emuna Elon's *House on Endless Waters*

Bettine Siertsema

Holocaust literature as a genre transcends linguistic and national borders. The distance in time, however, poses another kind of border, which is increasingly active now that less and less survivors are there to give testimony and many young people are indifferent to that part of history. In literature, the stranger appears to be an apt trope to bridge the 80 years' distance to the Shoah, as representative of the lack of knowledge that the younger readership may have.

Also, the stranger, being an outsider, can work as a narrative catalyst in revealing ugly truths about the past of individuals and communities, such as a family, a town, or a whole nation. This may as well be the case with the authors themselves. Foreign authors can confront a nation with problematic elements of its past.

In 2016 Israeli writer Emuna Elon published her novel *House on Endless Waters*, which is set in the Netherlands. The main character is an Israeli writer, visiting Amsterdam, who is a stranger to his city of birth and to his own past. He uncovers his real identity and the history behind it. The novel can be read as a reproach aimed at both Dutch society as bystanders and the Jewish upper class. It is translated into Dutch as *Sonja's zoon* (2018).

Bettine Siertsema will discuss this novel and the trope of the stranger in relation to the Holocaust past, and the question what unexpected insights a foreign author may have to offer a Dutch readership.

A Strange Desire: Uncovering Dutch Holocaust Trauma through Longing and Witnessing in *The Safekeep*

Dawn Skorczewski

This presentation explores the transformative role of desire—metaphorically embodied as the stranger—in the process of witnessing and recovering traumatic Holocaust histories in Yael van der Wouden's *The Safekeep* (2024). In this novel, desire functions as a disruptive force that both conceals and uncovers a traumatic history, serving as the key to accessing repressed memories and engaging with difficult truths embedded in the Dutch post war landscape.

The Safekeep centers on a young Jewish woman who enters a secluded Dutch household, where her presence awakens long-buried secrets surrounding the appropriation of Jewish possessions and the silence surrounding collaboration. Desire is not merely romantic or personal but becomes a stranger—an alien longing that pushes past social taboos and historical silences. It is the catalyst for witnessing trauma, as the protagonist's passionate and taboo desires threaten to expose hidden truths that have been carefully concealed, even by herself. Desire acts as a form of historical witness, compelling the characters—and the reader—to confront what has been deliberately ignored or forgotten.

Dutch history's complex relationship with the Holocaust in the first 25 years after the war was marked by a tendency toward denial, silence, or superficial acknowledgment. Van der Wouden figures desire as a stranger to disrupt these narratives, unmasking the figure of the Jewish woman as a victim of social complicity, silence, and the denial of trauma. The Jewish woman's desire, coupled with its forbidden partner in a Dutch woman who is not Jewish, becomes a vital force for uncovering the concealed layers of history, acting as both an agent of failure and resilience in the act of remembrance.

In *The Safekeep*, desire's role as stranger emphasizes that the path to recovering from trauma is fuelled by longing—an insistence on connection that defies social repression. The stranger's desire acts as a mirror to the suppressed histories of the Holocaust, revealing the unspoken, fostering acknowledgment, and making visible the hidden or marginalized aspects of Dutch collective memory. Desire as stranger thus becomes a force for witness—an essential impulse in confronting trauma, reclaiming silenced histories, and ensuring they are preserved for future generations.

This presentation considers desire's transformative power as both disruptive and redemptive—highlighting its central role in the ongoing process of witnessing, uncovering, and healing from the atrocities of the Shoah within Dutch cultural memory.

An Experiment in Early Persecution: Luxembourg as a Testing Ground for Anti-Jewish Policy in Western Europe

Linda Graul

This paper examines the extraordinary speed and density with which anti-Jewish legislation was introduced in Luxembourg and argues that the territory functioned as a testing ground for the subsequent deployment of antisemitic policy across Western Europe. After Gauleiter Gustav Simon assumed office as head of the civil administration on 29 July 1940, the occupiers established, within barely more than a month, a coherent and operational legal framework of exclusion that preceded the first *Judenverordnungen* in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, promulgated only between late September and late October 1940.

Drawing on newly analysed administrative and legal documentation, the paper demonstrates how Simon, motivated by ideological radicalism and personal ambition, deliberately accelerated the implementation of anti-Jewish measures ahead of the relevant ministries in Berlin. His strategy relied on the transplantation and recombination of core elements of the Nuremberg Laws with economic control mechanisms. The introduction of the Reich's complex foreign-exchange legislation on 27 August 1940 confronted Luxembourg's population, unfamiliar with this dense normative system, with extensive reporting obligations, approval requirements, and punitive sanctions. For the Jewish community, this created immediate legal insecurity, compelled comprehensive financial disclosure, and channelled all economic activity into tightly supervised institutional pathways. The effect was a near-instant curtailment of economic self-determination and the establishment of a pre-emptive architecture of dispossession.

The subsequent "Verordnung über Maßnahmen auf dem Gebiete des Judenrechts", published on 5 September 1940, created the racialised legal plateau upon which the expropriation regime could firmly rest. The decree reproduced essential mechanisms of the Nuremberg Laws, extended several discriminatory provisions, particularly those concerning persons classified as "mixed", and adapted

the legal categories to the territorial logic of the occupation. Issued on the same day, the “Verordnung über das jüdische Vermögen in Luxemburg” transformed this legal scaffolding into a comprehensive system for seizure. Together, these measures reveal a synchronised strategy in which legal degradation and economic expropriation were fused into an unusually rapid process of domination, turning Luxembourg into an early laboratory of Nazi anti-Jewish policy.

By situating Luxembourg within a comparative regional chronology, the paper challenges centre-periphery assumptions that depict small occupied territories as passive recipients of National Socialist initiatives. Instead, it argues that Luxembourg served as an anticipatory sphere of experimentation whose accelerated legal innovations foreshadowed the modalities of anti-Jewish legislation later applied across the Low Countries. This perspective offers new insights into the spatial dynamics and ideological pragmatics of anti-Jewish persecution in Western Europe.

Post-war or post-Holocaust? Parliamentary debates and the legislative process regarding compensation in Luxembourg

Jana Müller

The 1950 war-damages law (“Loi du 25 février 1950 concernant l’indemnisation des dommages de Guerre”) is the central cornerstone of war-damage compensation in Luxembourg after the Second World War. This framework does not only incorporate legislation on damages caused by combat operations on Luxembourgish territory, but it de facto includes compensation for material consequences of the Holocaust and thus holds a relevance to Jewish claimants. Yet the point of reference in this law on compensation clearly is not the Holocaust, but the war itself. This in turn leads to a restriction on which damages can be compensated for and thus affects those that have been persecuted and dispossessed during the occupation of Luxembourg.

Against this backdrop, the proposed paper would like to look at the legislative process that led to the establishment of this war-damages law, its subsequent modifications and the adjacent legislation of relevance to Jewish compensation in Luxembourg. By working with parliamentary debates and the parliamentary decision-making process, I would like to analyze how this legislation came about and that considerations played a decisive role. What place did the question of Holocaust-related compensation occupy in these debates? In how far was the persecution of Jewish inhabitants of Luxembourg taken into consideration during the writing of the relevant laws? And what can these debates reveal about the contemporary understanding of persecution and dispossession in Luxembourg?

This analysis thus aims at revealing the arguments and motifs leading to a partially restrictive compensation legislation and to understand the consequences of the decisions taken on compensation for Holocaust survivors in Luxembourg.

Looted in Belgium, recovered to Belgium. Who is the rightful owner of Jan Denens’s Vanitas?

Sabrina Lind

The Flemish government invests in provenance research focusing on the period of the Second World War. One aspect of this engagement involves investigating the provenance of the so-called “DER works”, paintings repatriated from Germany to Belgium after the war. In the early 1950s, the Department for Economic Recovery (DER) transferred some of them to different museums in Belgium

as a long-term loan. Currently, 38 of these paintings are held in Flemish museums, including the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA). Given that the last major studies of these artworks occurred around the turn of the millennium, it is now opportune to re-examine the DER works. This renewed investigation will leverage newly accessible sources, such as online resources from Fold3 and the Deutsches Historisches Museum, and incorporate contemporary (digital) research methodologies, including close collaboration with restorers.

About the paintings at the KMSKA – 20 (21) in total, the specific circumstances of the changes of ownership in the period of the Second World War are not comprehensively studied yet. However, status as of now, only one painting is clearly looted by the Nazis: the *Vanitas* by Jan Denens (inv. 5054). It had been confiscated by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) during the Möbelaktion in Belgium (1942–1944), from a Jewish owner who had to leave his home. But who was the Jewish owner? Until now, the rightful owner has not been identified yet – but more research still must be conducted. The information about the painting's provenance which already is known, can be found on the KMSKA-website – together with a request to the public to share new information. I would like to use the platform of this 18th Contact Day to draw attention to this specific DER work, but also to the other DER works as well as to the fact that we need the exchange with the Jewish (scholarly) community to reconstruct the history of the paintings and to find the rightful owners.