

**Abstracts 8th Contact Day Jewish Studies Low Countries, 12 May 2015****Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld, *East Meets West: Balkan Sephardim In Early Modern Amsterdam***

When Jews from the eastern Sephardi diaspora, mostly Balkan Jews, arrived to Amsterdam by the end of the seventeenth century, fleeing devastation and pogroms, the confrontation with Sephardim from the west must have been astonishing. Even though connected through ethnic-religious bonds, there was a complete difference in background. Most of the Sephardim of Amsterdam were Conversos. They had been living as Catholics – outwardly at least - for generations and returned to the faith of their forefathers in a city like Amsterdam. Often they were educated at Iberian universities and got acquainted with the most modern ideas of European society at the time. Meanwhile they had to be re-educated as so called ‘New Jews’ and get (re-) connected to a normative Jewish life. Most of the Sephardim from the east on the other hand had lived a Jewish life as a natural part of their identity, for many generations in a row. They were in most cases the offspring of Jews, who as such had arrived from the peninsula after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and had settled in the different centers of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. The chain of tradition in Judaism was never broken. Many had studied at famous *yeshivot* in the east and were well versed in Hebrew and Jewish sources, while to a certain degree they became part and parcel of the Oriental and North African culture as well.

My paper will deal with the social composition of the Balkan Jews arriving in Amsterdam. The discussion will also focus upon the way eastern Sephardim were received by the Portuguese Jews in comparison to other migrant groups settling down within the Amsterdam Portuguese community. Moreover, their absorption into the community will be a case to be dealt with, looking into aspects of ‘intermarriage’ and other forms of social integration over time. Sephardi solidarity and the integration of East into West will be a final issue at stake.

**Thomas Verbruggen**, *Under the moon and the stars: the story of the Levantine Jewish community in Antwerp and its transformation (1880-1930)*

In the 1880s, a small group of diamond merchants from Istanbul arrived in the city of Antwerp. They were members of a group, often forgotten in historiography: the Eastern Sephardim. Although this group of people would never be as large as in the great cities of New York and Paris, these Levantine Jews established their own congregation and several associations. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the community was joined by vendors and peddlers, who fled from growing anti-Semitism, nationalism, and conscription in their home country.

Recently, many scholars studied the history of these people in the context of the Ottoman Empire. However, as soon as they migrated and became small minorities in several big European and American cities, they almost disappear from the academic radar. Nevertheless, the history of the Eastern Sephardim and their migration towards new continents, raises several interesting questions concerning Jewish identity and community life. In my master thesis, I will try to answer three of them: How did this small minority relate itself to other Jewish and Levantine groups in Antwerp? To what extent did this group of wealthy merchants and poor vendors represent a strong community? And finally, what was the impact of the events, surrounding the First World War in the Ottoman Empire and Europe, on the composition of this community and the life and identity of each of its members?

To answer these questions, I will mainly use the immigration dossiers of the Antwerp Police. These sources give me the opportunity to quantify certain demographic data, such as marriage, occupational, and residential patterns. But they also enable me to study the way these people were identified by outsiders and themselves, and, amongst other sources, allow me some insights in particular conflicts and types of co-operation within and outside the community borders. The results of this research will be compared with related communities within Antwerp, and studies on Eastern Sephardic communities in Istanbul, Salonika, New York, and Paris.

**Yasmina Zian**, *Did the First World War impact the Jewish Migrant's Life in Belgium?*

*The attitude of the Sûreté Publique between 1900 - 1930*

“After the Belgian army's retreat from Antwerp, the soldier, Collignon, (...) husband of my servant, was in Brussels to spy out the German army and at the risk of my life and my wives' life, he slept at our place. Mr René Q, a Belgian reformed voluntary from Antwerp, wanted to join the Belgian army through by Holland. He was arrested by the “Boches” at the border but he managed to escape, and even if he was risking prison, he lived at my home during seven or nine months. One day, he was arrested and thanks to my money he succeeded to corrupt the *Boches* and to continue to enjoy the freedom”<sup>1</sup>

This is a testimony of a Jewish foreigner<sup>2</sup>, who was in jail after the war because he was accused of collaborating with the enemy. In order to get out of the jail, he wrote some letters to the head of *Sûreté Publique* to testimony his patriotism during the war. He stayed in jail for some more months before he was found innocent. This testimony is very interesting because it illustrates the war experience of a Jewish foreigner, as he described it: he reported that he was ready to sacrifice his life for Belgium, which was the victim of German barbarity. I find this letter in the archives of the *Sûreté Publique*, which was organised to watch all the strangers and to expel them if they were suspected of being dangerous. In this archive I can also read some letters of the *Sûreté Publique*, who show the attitude of the State with the strangers before, during and after the war. These archives give also the possibility to be close to the foreigner and to understand some individual mechanisms, which are not visible in other archives, because of the absence of the stranger or the individual stories.

---

<sup>1</sup> This information comes from the file n°866 556 of the *Police des Etrangers aux Archives Général du Royaume* in Brussels.

<sup>2</sup> By this word “foreigner” I understand all the people who are living in Belgium without having the Belgian nationality. To illustrate the meaning here of “Jewish”, I quote Sartre: « Le Juif est un homme que les autres hommes tiennent pour Juif ». With this concept, I can consider that the Jewish are people who can be identified like Jewish by the *Sûreté Publique*.

This presentation will focus on the consequences of war on the construction of the image of the “Jewish foreigner”. To achieve this goal, I will study the attitude of the *Sûreté Publique* between, during and after the war. A comparison with strangers, who were not Jewish, will be made. It’s very important for this subject to change the perspective: it opens a new field for the anti-Semitism research. To complete this qualitative analyse, I will also use some studies about the intergroup-relation and the quantitative method of the social psychology. We will find that during each of this three periods (before, during, after the war), the *Sûreté Publique* has a peculiar construction of the “bad Jewish”.

**Barbara Tanenbaum and Riki Kooyman, *Jewish feelings, Jewish practice? Children of Jewish intermarriage in the Netherlands***

This study aims to get a better insight into the Jewish identity of children from Jewish intermarriage in the Netherlands. Based on 50 in-depth interviews with persons between the ages of 20 – 40 who have one Jewish parent and have different levels of community development, one of our major findings is that all respondents identify with Judaism in some way depending on their personal situation. However, for many respondents a large gap exists between *feeling* Jewish and *acting* upon it. In addition, some have experienced a 'defining moment' in their lives that sparked a change in Jewish feeling or Jewish practice. The memory of the Shoah as well as the state of Israel proved to be of huge importance when it comes to how respondents relate to Judaism. There is a substantial group for whom the Shoah represents the only connection to Judaism. In addition, the social/ cultural connection was one of the areas in which respondents express their Jewish identity: many feel a connection of belonging to the Jewish people. Furthermore, specific themes that influence Jewish identity were studied. Upbringing has a major influence and the bond with grandparents was of great importance. Most important though is the difference between having a Jewish father and Jewish mother: for those with a Jewish father their Jewish identity is complex, as they often feel Jewish but aren't regarded as such. Those who have a Jewish mother have a choice whether to participate whether they feel Jewish or not. Finally, a vast majority of respondents experienced the Jewish community as closed off and unwelcoming. We therefore recommend to welcome new members into the community; be open and inclusive for *all* people with a Jewish background.

**Wim Penninx, *Using DNA information to study the migration of Jews***

A short overview is presented on the possibilities of using DNA-analyses for genealogical research. Already many publications were written on the results of the DNA-measurements on the Jewish history, often with contradictory conclusions.

The author presents his systematic approach to collect Y-DNA data of about 2000 persons in about 100 Ashkenazi male-line branches. It appears that most of the data is consistent with the historic information of the Jewish history. The data give additional information, e.g. on the location and the percentage of people that changed religion to Judaism far from Judea.

A set of Jewish persons from the Low countries was analysed and the origin of their male-line is presented. Several members are typical examples of known Ashkenazi branches. In one example the person had Ashkenazi or Sephardic ancestry; his Y-DNA ancestry shows that he is closely related to a Jewish branch in Turkey. The shared origin goes, almost certainly, back to Iberia before the Expulsion of the Jews.

**Jacques Déom, *Project Antwerp, a Metropolis of Hassidism***

Since Jacques Gutwirth's pioneering work in the sixties, no overall description of the hassidic community residing in Antwerp, one of the major centers of contemporary Hassidism, has seen the light of day. While this great religious movement has gone through an astonishing development, little attention has been devoted to the Belgian facets of this metamorphosis. So it appears necessary to provide an up to date description of this specific community. The Foundation of Contemporary Memory (CIERL, Université libre de Bruxelles) intends to initiate a monography in English bearing on all aspects of contemporary Hassidism in Antwerp. This is intended to be a collective work, resulting from the close cooperation of the best internationally recognized scholars. It will aim to provide a full, reliable and up to date analysis of its subject matter. It will meet the standards and the interests of Jewish studies and contemporary social and cultural anthropology. As well as a renewed access to the material covered in the 1970 study, the programmed volume should shed light on aspects of Antwerp Hassidism which were hardly approached as yet or too briefly dealt with, such as the transnational dimensions of the movement, the life of woman, the relationships with public authorities. The 8<sup>th</sup> Study Day will give the Foundation an opportunity to attract the researchers' attention on its initiative.

**Tsila Rädcker**, Addressing the 'Jewish Question' with Humor. A Comparison between Nicolaas Francois Hoefnagel (1735-1784) and Jewish Satire

Satire triggers political action. Bill Maher's characterization of the Islam as a mafia religion and Dieudonné's typology of the Shoah as memorial pornography have aroused supporters and proponents alike to petition, protest and, even, riot. The satirical mechanisms of in- and exclusion come particularly to the fore in the construction of national identities. The Ashkenazi Jews of Amsterdam form an excellent case study as they were one of the first and largest migrant communities struggling with satirical representations. Satirical media condemned the Jews for their poverty, reluctance to embrace the values of dominant society and questioned their eligibility for citizenship. These issues came to be known as the 'Jewish question'.

Jewish and non-Jewish media engaged with these pejorative representations. This created a social space where everyone could contribute to, yet reiterated social hierarchy by subordinating Jewish poverty to Dutch prosperity. Jews were the object of derogatory qualifications but also appropriated its ethnic humor, redefining their secondary status. However, the sharing of satirical images between communities did not invariably lead to a civil discussion. In the struggle between patriots and royalists, the Jews were represented as stubborn supporters of an old and outdated regime. Satire dragged the Jewish question into the political domain and, in fact, instigated occasional eruptions of violence between Jews and patriots.

This paper investigates the interplay between political action, representation and humor. It will contextualize the eighteenth century Hoefnagel's satirical image of the Jews and compares it to the Jewish self-representation. As such, this paper will identify mechanisms of Jewish self-labelling and othering.



**Huibert Schijf**, *The dynamics of Jewish High Society in Amsterdam and Vienna, 1850-1918*

The presentation addresses the question why there was a *relative* small Jewish elite in Amsterdam. To try to answer the question another city is used as point of reference: Vienna. Amsterdam was the capital of a small country, and with a large port. It was an important financial centre in Northern Europe but much of its trade was oriented towards colonial Indonesia. Few Jews were involved in that trade. Vienna was the booming capital of the huge and ethnically diverse Habsburg Empire and the financial centre for that Empire. While Vienna received migrants from all over the empire, Amsterdam Jewish migrants came substantially from Germany, especially Westphalia. In the nineteenth century, both cities had an influx of Jewish newcomers who founded banking houses, fashion shops or were involved in the diamond industry or trade. In Amsterdam, a rather stable ten per cent of the population was Jewish. In Vienna, that percentage increased from 6.5 percent in 1869 to 8.6 per cent in 1910. Since the arrival of Sephardic families in Amsterdam during the sixteenth century, there was a contrast between them and the Ashkenazic families who were in general much poorer. In the nineteenth century, in Vienna a stratagem was developed to renew traditional high society, making it more multinational and representative of the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire. That stratagem was also profitable to Jewish High Society because it created, among others, new ennoblements and opportunity chances.

The basic units of research are families as these formed the most important network in the nineteenth century. Thanks to the ground-breaking genealogical work by Georg Gaugusch (2012), a systematic study of Jewish High Society in Vienna has become possible. For Amsterdam comparable data exist but are far less elaborated.

**Froukje Demant**, *Living together in a vanished world. Post-war relations between Jews and non-Jews in Twente and the German border region*

After the end of World War II, Jews who had survived the annihilation returned to what the Dutch historian Evelien Gans has called a 'vanished world'. They had to rebuild their lives, and their relations to the non-Jewish surroundings, in a new normality. This paper explores the post-war everyday relations between Jews and non-Jews in the Dutch province of Twente. To understand these relations and to get insight in the specificities and universalities of the post-war living together of Jews and non-Jews in this region, the relations are compared to the post-war Jewish/non-Jewish relations at the other side of the border, in the Westmünsterland and the Grafschaft Bentheim.

Many Twentse Jews were shocked and disappointed by the indifferent, sometimes even anti-Semitic, reactions of the non-Jews after their return from camps or hiding places. Still, the post-war relations in Twente were of a less strained nature than at the German side. This difference can be explained by the different experiences of persecution in everyday life that the Jews at the German and Dutch side had during the years of Nazi rule and occupation.

While Jews in the German border region were actively degraded, isolated and exploited by their former non-Jewish acquaintances and friends, most non-Jews in Twente reacted rather passively and resigned to the anti-Jewish measures of the German occupier. On the level of everyday interactions, this means that they sympathized with the Jews, but that they did not actively resist the anti-Jewish policies or help the persecuted; a position that I coin 'sympathizing passivity'. Thus, in contrast to Jews under Nazi rule at the German side of the border, Jews in Twente were not expelled from the order of equal citizens and human beings by their non-Jewish environment. Jews and non-Jews kept *sharing* a notion of a sharp moral divide between sympathetic but oppressed Dutchmen on the one hand, and the German occupier and a limited group of 'traitors' on the other hand.

This means that after the war, Twentse joden had the expectation that they would return to an order that they understood and shared with non-Jews. The non-Jewish indifference to the fate of the Jews, the fights over properties, and the realisation that more than 75% of the

Dutch Jews were deported and murdered, shook this notion of a shared moral order, but did not lead to its complete breakdown; the realisation that the non-Jewish surroundings were not as sympathetic and supporting as expected, did not change the fundamental notion of an outside (German) enemy. In other words, Twentse Jews saw the non-Jews as disappointingly indifferent to, but not guilty of, the recent persecution and murder. Therefore, in contrast to most German Jewish survivors, who felt that every single 'ordinary' German could potentially be a betrayer or even a murderer, in Twente there was room to (re)build friendly relationships between Jews and non-Jews.

**Karin Hofmeester**, *Jews from Antwerp and Amsterdam and the Diamond Diaspora's in WW I and WW II*

The purpose of my presentation is to sketch the 'global picture' of the diamond diaspora's that developed during WWII. This overview will provide a context for the Cuban case study that will be presented by Judy Kreith and hopes to place the development of these WW II diaspora's in the wider framework of the development of diamond centers during WW I that sometimes had their roots in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Finally we will take the development of new diamonds centers during the interwar period into account.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Amsterdam and Antwerp were the undisputed centers for diamond trading and finishing, London being the prime center for the trade in rough diamonds. By that time, small pockets existed in London and New York, established in the 1870's and the 1890's respectively, by Jewish diamond people from Amsterdam. (Other pockets could be found in St-Claude in the Jura and in Idar-Oberstein and Hanau, both centers were established by local dealers, cutters and polishers).

During WW I many Jewish (and some Gentile) diamond merchants and workers had fled from Antwerp to Amsterdam and Scheveningen while some went to London and New York. Immediately after the War, the Belgian government stimulated the diamond merchants and workers in the Netherlands to return to Antwerp, a policy that was successfully repeated during WW II as Veerle Vanden Daelen will show in her presentation.

During the interwar period while the Antwerp sector revived, the Amsterdam center declined and the other dots on the global diamond map had become smaller, new industries were established in South-Africa and Palestine, the latter very much based on skills transferred by Jewish diamond people from Amsterdam and Antwerp.

On the eve of WW II many Jewish diamond merchants and workers fled Antwerp again, most went to New York, some to London and Palestine, others to less known places such as Cuba and Brazil. Documents from the Archive of the Universal Alliance of Diamond Workers give us insight in the many ties that existed between Jews in the diamond diaspora's and the Antwerp and Amsterdam home towns.

**Judith Kreith, *Diamond-Cutting and Polishing Jewish refugees from Europe in Cuba, 1941-1945***

In the beginning of World War Two between the years 1939 and 1942, several Portuguese ships took thousands of Jewish refugees from Nazi-invaded Europe to Cuba as refugees. Cuba admitted them, at first in an open refugee camp. Steadily it was realized that the refugees had skills that could be employed to mutual benefit. Enterprising diamond-connected individuals from Belgium and Holland set up companies and factories to begin diamond processing for cutting and faceting to gem quality. Over 6000 Jewish refugees were in Cuba at this time and many took part in the new enterprise, along with Cuban workers. This talk shows photographs, articles, memories of the people involved and reports a project to draw together all these materials into a history that has a number of interesting themes. One of those is the openness of the Cuban people and government to the Jewish refugees. The other is the sheer enterprise and organizational ability of the refugees. Many people associated with the episode have dear memories of this unique and somewhat unexpected happening in history. Many of the refugees later returned to Belgium. Others moved on to other countries with a large number immigrating to the USA.



*Marion Finkels Kreith, ca. 1943, Havana Cuba, diamond girdling.*

**Veerle Vanden Daelen, *The Return of the Diamond Sector and its Jews to Antwerp: Negotiations and Politics during and immediately after the Second World War***

During the Second World War, and especially from 1942, the Belgian Government in-exile seems to have been more preoccupied with, and surely more successful in, negotiations and arrangements for the return of the diamond sector to Belgium than with protecting or rescuing persecuted Jews in the country. The Government in-exile maintained close contacts with the Jewish diamond diaspora, and made preparations to secure the supply of rough diamonds to Antwerp after the liberation. Once the country was liberated, the government adopted far-reaching measures in its efforts to convince the diamond diaspora to return to Belgium. These contrasted dramatically with the meagre assistance that other Jews received after the war.

But why did the Jewish diamond diaspora have such a high return rate to Antwerp after the Second World War, despite the fact that many groups had organized a Jewish community life in their places of exile, some with the intention to stay? I argue that the connection between the Belgian Jewish Committee in London and the *Correspondence* Office for the Diamond Industry (COFDI) holds the key explanation. The diamond sector afforded Antwerp's Orthodoxy the means and capabilities to revive in the immediate aftermath of World War II. At a time of widespread crisis and emergency throughout the Jewish world, having such a possibility at hand made for the Orthodox community leaders and diamond dealers that they were in favour of this return. As such, the intertwining of religious practice and economic practices in postwar Jewish Antwerp ensured communal cohesion and facilitated an unusual development of Orthodoxy in western Europe.