

Karin Hofmeester, *The socio-economic Position of Jews in the Netherlands in the 19th century: Myths and Realities*

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Before we dive into the details on the socio-economic position of Jews in the Netherlands in the 19th Century and its Myths and realities: I first want to sketch the big picture for you

Slide 2

- 1796 Emancipation: Jews have full citizenship rights
- In principle this meant they could settle where they wanted, take up any job, vote and be elected
- Consequence of various transnational developments:
- Enlightenment, Jewish Enlightenment, French Revolution, Napoleon
 - Ideas about tolerance, self-fulfillment, improvement, 'régénération', education and legal equality
- Ideas about Jewish equality and social-economic improvement travel through Europe and beyond

To give you an idea of this transnationalism:

Slide 3

Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden (1783) (von Dohm seit 1786)

A book that influenced the debate on Jewish Emancipation, written by a Prussian civil servant often seen in Enlightened circles in Berlin, acquainted with Moses Mendelssohn, he advocated equal rights for Jews, including the opening up of (almost) all professions.

Von Dohm was inspired to write his pamphlet by Moses Mendelssohn himself

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Mendelssohn whom we of course as one of the most important leading figures of the Haskala, the Jewish Enlightenment. He wrote a.o.

Jerusalem, oder über die religiöse Macht und Judentum (1782)

A plea for religious tolerance and equality. Mendelssohn in his turned was asked for help by

Slide 5

Herz Cerff Berr from Alsace. So the true origin of all of this lay in Alsace

Mémoire sur l' état des Juifs en Alsace (1780)

The Jews of Alsace were at that moment the target of heavy anti-Semitic attacks. The image of the Jew as **usurer** [wucherer] was spread – many Jews acted as moneylenders - , anti-Semitic pamphlets circulated, riots occurred and Jewish houses were destroyed.

The affair pointed public attention to the position of the Jews and their alleged role as usurers and Cerff Berr – an important Jewish community leader and business man who had contacts with the Berlin Haskalah movement decided a **Mémoire** should be written to be send to Council of State (Conseil d'Etat).

Cerff Berr asked Mendelssohn to help him, which he certainly did, but he also thought it would be wise if a non-Jewish civil servant should be called in. This was Von Dohm who later published his *Über de Bürgerliche Verbesserung* with the *Mémoire* as part of it.

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Finally, the ideas were widely spread in France by Count Mirabeau, born in France, spent time in the Dutch Republic (1776), in England (1784),

in Berlin (1786) where he visited the salons of enlightened Jewish ladies and became impressed by Moses Mendelssohn. He would play an important part in the French Revolution, in drafting "The Declaration of the Rights of Man .

He wrote *Sur Moses Mendelssohn, sur la reforme politique des juifs*

More or less a repetition of what Von Dohm had written.

On England and the Netherlands he remarked (...) **C'est-là que les juifs sont les plus rapprochés des droits de l'homme & du citoyen, & c'est aussi là qu'ils sont des membres très utiles à l'état**ⁱ

It is important to understand that these writings shaped the debate about Jewish emancipation and the ideals spread by these men echoed in parliamentary debates about granting Jews citizenship rights, but also in Jewish enlightened circles in the Dutch Republic, in their reports, their pamphlets and later in pro-Emancipation Jewish newspapers and – important for us - **also in Jewish historiography.**

All these writers held a plea for the opening up of various professions for Jews, but where Cerff Berr asked for opening up **Commerce** in the broadest sense of the word, Von Dohm stated that opening up all professions would lead to a turning away from commerce and a diminishing lust for profit which corrupted Jews in their current position. **He added an extra dimension** The professions that would make Jews truly useful and happy citizens: were **crafts and agriculture:**

I quote Von Dohm: (112)

“Die **stillsitzende** Lebensart und der **ruhige** Fleiß, den diese [=Handwerke] fordern, ist dem **unruhigen** Umherschweiften des handelnden Juden, dieser ruhiger Genuß **des Gegenwärtigen** und **Zufriedenheit mit Wenigem**, seinen **Hoffnungen von der Zukunft**, seiner **Begierde nach Gewinn**, seinen Rechnungen auf immerschwankende

Procente **entgegengesetzt**. Zugleich wird die harte Arbeit, gröbere und starker Nahrung des Handwerkers auch auf seine physische Constitution einen vortheilhaften Einfluß haben”

Agriculture would have the same kind of healing influence on Jews. Implicitly or explicitly advocates of Jewish emancipation expected Jews to leave commerce for what it was and take up crafts and agriculture. Only this would make Emancipation a successful endeavor and Jews a happy and useful member of the state. This is one part of the Myth I refer to in my title, or perhaps **false expectation** is a better term, since most Jews, as we will see, did not turn to crafts and agriculture...

Slide 7

Now that we know the international debate the Dutch Emancipation fitted in, let go back to Dutch reality.

- **1796 ‘National Decree’**
- **Before that federal rule: 1579 Unie van Utrecht**
- Treaty signed by a number of Dutch provinces stating that together they would try to fight the Spaniards out and to settle a number of important things on federal level such as defense, taxes, and religion: **No one would be prosecuted because of his or her religion.**
- [1657 decree of the Estates General: Jews are subject, but decision to admit Jews on the territory and grant them poorterschap (citizenship of the city) was decided per municipality.
- **De facto: each municipality decided**
- Though Jews were more or less protected by this federal decision, local communities (provinces and towns) could decide to allow Jews to on their territory or not. Jews could buy the so-called ‘poorterschap’ rudimentary form of urban citizenship, though in their case it was not hereditary (the Hague was an exception to this rule)ⁱⁱ

and in some cities - like Amsterdam the trades open only to burghers were closed to Jewish burghers. **As a consequence of the political autonomy of local administrations in this matter several cities for a long time banned Jewish settlement: Groningen lifted its ban in 1711, Leiden, Delft and Haarlem allowed Jewish settlement in the 1720s and 1730s, the city of Utrecht maintained its ban until 1789, Deventer until the 1790s and Gouda did not allow new settlements of Jews as late as 1795.** (Israel 658 voor een overzicht voor andere vestiging restricties zie Knippenberg⁵⁷ ff and Israel 1026 ff) .

- **Big regional differences**
- **Remain influential after 1796**

Even though the Dutch Republic, later kingdom, was small, there were large regional differences which also translated in the way the socio-economic emancipation of Jews developed. **We should be aware of those regional differences.**

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In the historiography of Jews in the Netherlands there is a great stress on Amsterdam. Often the city is seen as pars pro toto which is understandable, but not correct.

This map shows us concentration in Amsterdam, more than 70% of all Jews lived in Amsterdam, is a consequence of Amsterdam's rich past, no restrictions on immigration, not even on poor Jews. At the same time there were all kinds of economic restrictions.

In most cities most guilds were closed for Jews, in Amsterdam only the guilds of doctors, brokers and book sellers was open to Jews. Also, sometimes Jews could pay for the privilege to be tolerated by a guild, as they did for the clothing sellers guild, and there were trades where no guild existed, such as the diamond trade.

In Groningen Jews could occasionally become member of the merchants guild. Also the butchers guild and the buttonmaers guild allowed Jews as members.

Slide 9: 1809

Direct effect of Emancipation: migration from cities from the West, especially from Amsterdam, to the countryside, that is to say the cities in the countryside in the North and the East. Not, like we know of France, a migration from the country side Alsace – to Paris.

Slide 10: 1859

Trend continues

Slide 11: population growth of cities with largest populations

Spectacular growth Jewish population Groningen.

So to take off the focus from Amsterdam a bit, we will follow both Amsterdam and Groningen.

What I will do during the rest of my presentation is to compare the soci-economic position of Jews in Amsterdam and Groningen in the 19th and early 20th century. We will look at poverty and poor relief, professions, changes in professions, occupational mobility and income mobility and see which Myths and expectations and also which realities were there.

To start with poverty in Amsterdam. Here we should partially **unravel another myth**: the extreme poverty of Jews in Amsterdam, especially in comparison to the rest of the population.

Let there be no mistake, poverty was abundant. The first half of the 19th century, was a period of economic hardship, for the whole of the Netherlands (except for agriculture in the Northern part) but even more so for Amsterdam.

First, Napoleons war with England and the economic blockade hindered international trade and on a more structural level Amsterdam had lost its position on the world market, there was no longer a large scale export, capital was lacking, the Dutch East India Company had gone bankrupt etctera.

Some 30 to 40% of the inhabitants received poor relief, mostly because the work that was available was seasonal, connected to work in and around the harbor, such as porters, but

also work in the clothing industry. So people made a living combining temporary jobs, poor relief and in some cases begging. Jews were no exception to that rule.

Slide 12

According to some authors, 54% of the Sephardim and 87 % of the Ashkenazim received relief in 1799 against 36.7 % of the total population of Amsterdam (Pinkas 59).

In the data on Jewish poor relief also those people who only received a gift once a year (matzos for Pesach) are included, a kind of relief that did not exist in other religious communities. Jews are not allowed to eat bread or any other foodstuff for that matter, containing yeast. Pesach remembers the sudden exile from Egypt, people were in a hurry no time to let the bread rise so to remember that Jews eat unleavened bread, matzos.

Distribution of matzos is not to be seen as hunger relief but as a policy to keep the community Pesach kosher.

From a list of 2721 (two thousand sevenhundred and twenty one) Jewish families in Amsterdam that received poor relief in 1809, 1368 (thirteen hundred and sixty eight) only received the once a year gift of matzos (Marco van Leeuwen Armoede in Amsterdam 334) **(=64.3%) dus 35,7 permanent**

If we compare the once-only relief of a few nickels that were distributed during the French and Batavian period, the amount of receivers amongst Reformed, Lutheran and Catholic poor is comparable high. (Marco van Leeuwen in Hetty Berg 57)

Slide 13

Foto Matze bakkerij Haan voor arme joden in Wenen 1920

Of course Jews were extra vulnerable because of the guild restrictions that lingered on, also after the official abolition of the guilds, and their concentration in a small number of professions as a consequence of that.

We have no general occupational overview yet for Jews in Amsterdam in 1809, we do know the professions of those who received some kind of poor relief so this gives a good overview of the professions of the lower classes of the Amsterdam Jewish Community

Slide 14 table 1 uit Marco van Leeuwen

Kruier = porter, working in harbor related jobs, temporary; old clothes dealer, vegetable seller, fish seller, second hand good dealer, women: seamstress; undefined working woman, porter; cleaning lady

Werker= casual laborer

Slide 15: Fish and pickle sellers, Drawing Christoffel Meijer 1806

So the general picture in contemporary descriptions and historiography is that Amsterdam Jews were poor in the 19th century, they were, certainly, but their poverty was more or less comparable to that of people from other religions living in other poor neighborhoods such as the Jordaan and the Eilanden.

With their concentration in street vending their poverty was very visible though!

This would all change in the last four decades of the 19th century: blossoming diamond industry, sugar refineries, ready to wear clothing industry, tobacco-industry

But before we discuss the economic change and its consequences, let's move to **Groningen**.

Slide 16 population slide again

Why Groningen? City had already a flourishing Jewish Community (allowed to stay there since 1711) with synagogue and everything else that was needed for a proper Jewish lifes.

Slide 17 twee synagoges

Since late 18th century there was agricultural growth in the province of Groningen, until 1820's, then there were occasional periods of crisis until 1850, then new agricultural fields were developed, and in the last quarter of the 19th century there was quite some industrialization.

Groningen and ommelanden: city and hinterland, city had a strong regional commercial function, more profit from agriculture, more consumption.

Slide 18

1808: percentage of total population with poor relief: 6%

Percentage of Jewish population: 25% (135 of total population of 510), but again including once a year matzos gift

If we stick to the 64.3 % of all Jewish poor relief = once a year relief rule, then $135 - 87 = 48 = 9.4\%$ of all Jews received poor relief. (source Stefan van der Poel 169)

Slide 19 Books on Groningen

Slide 20: Professions (most frequent)

Decrease 'merchant which could be anything, increase sales representatives/ increase teachers, seamstresses, tabelletje ernaast: algemene bevolking

Click total population, compared, most frequent Jewish and most frequent total

Total population

NB servants total 0,8, butchers 4,4.

Slide 21: beroepen op alfabet

1942: Administrators, lawyers, civil servants, medical doctors, administrators/director of companies

Slide 22 social mobility (incomes)

How do we explain this relatively high social mobility amongst Jews?

Success in trade and industry, ready to wear clothing industry, 5 en gros manufacturers together with 300 employees; (classic: old cloth dealers, trading in clothes, factory) printing house **Oppenheim**, paint factory.

In the course of the 19th century Jews send their children longer to school and to schools with better education; this did not lead to the entrance into crafts usually, but to a better position within commerce. The next generation then was more apt to enter professions like financial services, civil service, free professions.

At the end of the 19th century industrialization led to a bigger occupational diversification, Jews grabbed the opportunities to establish new industries in food, clothing, tobacco etc.

Slide 23

Wet Polak = C.Polak, alcoholic drinks but also Ranja famous syrup to make lemonade

Slide 24

Dry Polak=A.J. Polak= Pudding powder factory

No crafts no agriculture.

To come back to what I stated at the beginning of my presentation, the ideal of crafts and agriculture, also live in the hearts and minds of Dutch pro- Emancipation people:

“Will the Jew, from the despicable dust he has lived in for so many centuries, lift up his head and take on our crafts, agriculture, manufactures and trades to reach a higher social status?”

Hendrik Octavus Feith, son of poet Reihnvis Feith, 1817, Maatschappij tot Nut van t Algemeen, Groningen branch (Stefan Poels 30)

What was exactly the problem, why didn't they:

Let look at a series of three articles on crafts, published in the *Weekblad voor Israelieten*, Jewish pro-emancipation Weekly, in 1861

The author of the article was proud of Jewish scientists, lawyers, doctors, artists, diplomats, and also of the social mobility of clever merchants. Progress was visible, social mobility, mental uplifting it has all taken place, but there were still too little Jewish craftsmen.

Training poor Jews as craftsmen **was the cure against pauperism** and **'street trades'** (**straatbedrijven**) that were so abundant (and visible but that he does not say) amongst poor Jews.

Why did they not enter the crafts?

- Apparently Jews preferred to work with their heads, rather than with their hands

- Work in the crafts often seemed to be seasonal, so 'one of the most useful classes of society' was often without an income, petty trade then seemed to be more attractive and less seasonal
- During the period a young boy was trained as craftsman he did not earn money, many poor Jewish parents could not afford for that and send their boys off to work in commerce at an early age
- To be able to work more structural Jews should have a wider network (ruimen kring) and should not restrict themselves to working for Jews only, therefore they should perhaps keep Shabbat and the holidays less strictly... (that it took two to Tango and non-Jewish bosses should be willing to train and hire Jewish craftsmen is not mentioned).

More training opportunities was one of the solutions, we know that entering new crafts in general was not the way Jews gained a better socio-economic position in the Netherlands in the 19th century.

Slide 25

Migration back to Amsterdam, also The Hague, Rotterdam, when trade and industry started to flourish there again

Slide 26

How about socio-mobility there:

Hak, pak, zak= traditional professions: artikel Peter Tammes

'Hak' stood for butcher 'pak' for peddler and 'zak' voor trade in second hand goods

Slide 27

Professions in Amsterdam 1851

Concentration Diamond industry (= craft); trade ; under representation skilled work: construction; clothing, food en other industries, professions, domestic services, over representation unskilled work, casual laborers.

Diamond was a traditional Jewish trade in Amsterdam, had come with Sephardim in late 16th -17th century via Antwerp. No guilds, no guilds memories, Jewish tradition in the industry. Crafts! Quick money could be earned, but in periods of economic crises unemployment, back to casual labor.

Slide 28

Classes in Amsterdam 1851

HISCO is an occupational classification system that is both international and historical. It contains 1,600 occupational unit groups that are transformed into 12 social classes, based on manual/ non-manual; high, medium or lower skilled and keeping supervision yes or no.

NB second category looks quite posh but includes all the traders also the street vendors, overrepresentation unskilled work, though well represented in skilled work (diamond) and lower skilled.

Slide 29

Income mobility

In 1854:

Ashkenazi Jews 7.4 % of all voters while 10% of the total population.

Sephardic Jews 1.2 % of all voters while 1.1% of the total population.

In 1884:

Ashkenazi Jews 15.4% of all voters while 12.2 % of the total population.

Sephardic Jews 2.2% of the voters while 1.1% of the population

New voters: especially diamond traders and cutters and polishers.

Diamond industry started blossoming after big discoveries of rough diamonds in Africa in 1870's,

Slide 30**Foto's diamant industrie**

Small scale, larger scale, men and women

Slide 31**Profession of Jews in Amsterdam**

1851-1906

Increase diamond workers, food industry and trade; civil servants, decrease liberal professions seems strange, decrease casual (= unskilled) laborers.

Slide 32**Professions of Jews 1906 compared to professions total population 1909**

Overrepresentation diamond industry, underrepresentation construction, overrepresentation in trade; but also civil servants, liberal professions, female overrepresentation in domestic services, now underrepresentation in casual laborers

Slide 33**Professions in Amsterdam 1906-1941**

Decrease diamond industry, Antwerp had taken over leading position as polishing city, increase clothing industry, again trading and liberal professions

To conclude 19th century and early twentieth century socio-economic position

Jewish poverty was visible (street vending); specific Jewish poor relief led to myth about number of people who received poor relief compared to other religious groups. However, pervert was certainly there! Changed slowly in the course of the 19th century.

This was not the kind of socio-economic mobility Von Dohm and other Jewish and non-Jewish emancipators dreamed of. Criticism in Jewish newspapers, societies for improvement, complained about concentration in trade

However, income mobility was there, certainly in 1880's and 1890's! Both in Groningen and in Amsterdam.

Society had changed in the meantime, economy and industry had changed. In general Jews made carrier within Commerce, children of people who made some fortune were send to school, often second generation still in Commerce, network was good, and then their children would sometimes become civil servants, doctors, lawyers, other free professions. Also new industries, new food products like pudding powder, sugar, tobacco, ready-made clothing or renewed industries like diamond industry meant opportunities.

This latter process seems to have started a bit earlier and was more differentiated in Groningen than in Amsterdam.

In all the entrance in 'old crafts' seemed either difficult or unattractive, or both, but new opportunities were grabbed and alternative roads to respectable middle class professions found, within three generations.

ⁱ Le Comte de Mirabeau, *Sur Moses Mendelsson, sur la Réforme politique des Juifs en en partcuier sur la r" evolution tentée en leur faveur an 1753 dans la grande Bretagne* (Londres 1787), 80-81.