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Dutch Jews and the Dutch Jewish colony in Antwerp during the heydays of Eastern European Jewish immigration to Belgium, 1900-1940

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Abstract
Dutch Jews had a profound impact on the development of Belgium's Jewish community in the nineteenth century. More than a third of the Jews living on Belgian territory during this period were of Dutch descent. The mass arrival of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, transformed Belgian Jewish society. Dutch Jews now became a minority in Antwerp's Jewish population. This essay explores how in the first four decades of the twentieth century Dutch Jews preserved and negotiated spaces within Antwerp's Jewish society in which they could express their distinct Dutch Jewish identities. Their ties with Eastern European Jews will be explored and the place of Dutch Jews in Jewish society in general will be discussed. The intense contacts with the Eastern European Jewish world forced Dutch Jews in Antwerp to ask questions as to their own 'Jewish' identities.

Keywords: Belgium, Dutch Jewish immigration, integration, relations Eastern European Jews, early twentieth century.

Belgian Jewish history, especially from the turn of the nineteenth and early twentieth century onwards, has often been conceived and written through the prism of Eastern European Jewish immigration. Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewish immigrants, their identities, culture, and political and associational life have often been assigned the role of protagonists in Belgian Jewish historiography. This is not surprising given that approximately 40 per cent of the 70,000 to 75,000 Jews living in Belgium at the end of the interwar period consisted of Polish nationals, most of whom arrived after

the First World War.[1] Likewise, the majority of the prewar sources which make up the scattered and battered historical record of Jewish life in Belgium were compiled by Eastern European Jews and their organizations and shed a light on the enormous diversity of this Eastern European Yiddish diaspora in Belgium. Alternatively, sources emanating from the small group of acculturated Belgian Jews and the official religious institutions present a pathway to their worldviews, identities, and organizational life to which the Eastern European Jewish immigrant community has often been contrasted.[2]

Yet this dichotomy between an 'acculturationist' Belgian Jewry on the one hand and Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewish immigrants on the other, obscures the enormous diversity both within these groups internally and of Belgium's Jewish population more generally. Belgium's Eastern European Jewish community, for instance, was far from a monolithic block but consisted of different groups which — in addition to political, religious, and socio-economic differences — were divided by cultural and linguistic distinctions based on regional identities or national origin. The traditional mutual acrimony between *Litvakers* (Lithuanian Jews) and *Galitsianers* (Jews from Austro-Hungarian, and later Polish, Galicia), both Yiddish-speakers, did not subside once they arrived in Belgium. Next to Yiddish-speaking Jews the existence of a relatively large, though understudied, group of *Magyar*-speaking Jews, mostly Hungarian or Romanian (Transylvania) nationals, is reflected in the sources.[3] A small group of Russian Jews in Belgium strongly identified with Russian culture and in the early 1930s created Russian Jewish cultural associations such as the *Klub Russkikh Evreev v Bel'gii* (Club of Russian Jews in Belgium).[4] Apart from Eastern European Jews, Belgium's Jewish community in the early twentieth century numbered individuals from all over Western Europe and the Americas, small Sephardic communities from Algeria, the Ottoman Empire, and later Greece and Turkey, and comprised a relatively large and well-established Dutch Jewish community. It is to the latter group that this article draws attention.[5]

1 Meyer, Meinen, "Immigrés juifs dans l'économie belge", 37.; Stamberger, "Jewish Migration and the Making of a Belgian Jewry", 125.

2 For an overview and analysis of the state of Jewish archival material in Belgium, see Tallier, Desmet, Falek-Alhadeff, *Bronnen voor de geschiedenis van de Joden*.; Desmet, Stamberger, "Joodse jeugdorganisaties in België", 298-303.

3 "Der antverpener shmelts-top, ungarishe oder madiarishe yidn," *Der belgisher tog*, October 17, 1930, 6.; "Der antverpener shmelts-top, ungarishe oder madiarishe yidn," *Der belgisher tog*, October 22, 1930, 3.

4 Coudenys, *Leven voor de tsaar*, 144-45. ; YIVO Archives, David Trotsky papers, RG 235, Folder 51.

5 This research is based on my Ph.D. dissertation titled "Jewish Migration and the Making of a Belgian Jewry: Immigration, Consolidation, and Transformation of Jewish life in Belgium

Given the proximity and shared history of the Northern and Southern Low Countries, Dutch Jews played an important part in the genesis of Belgium's Jewish community in the nineteenth century. Dutch Jews made up the majority of the immigrants arriving in Belgium prior to and after the establishment of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1831, followed closely by Jewish immigrants from the German states and the French region of Alsace. In 1817, for instance, the Jewish community of Brussels consisted of 53 per cent Dutch Jews, and sixteen per cent German Jews.[6] While the events of the Belgian Revolution in 1830 would lead many Dutch Jews to return north, in the following decades many more would cross the southern border in search of economic opportunities.[7] More than one third of the Jews who immigrated to Belgium between the years 1840 and 1890 (at which date Belgium's entire Jewish population is estimated at some 12,650 individuals) came from the Netherlands.[8] They predominantly settled in the north, centre, east and west of the country. In Ghent and Antwerp, Dutch Jews became the dominant national group which was reflected by their leading positions in the boards of the local Jewish communities and the character of the religious services. The common denomination of Antwerp's grand synagogue at the *Bouwmeesterstraat*, inaugurated in 1893, as the '*Hollandse Sjoel*', even today serves as a reminder of this legacy. In places such as Brussels, where Dutch Jews formed an important minority (or at times a socio-economically disenfranchised majority[9]) within the Jewish community, certain groups of Dutch Jews preferred to establish religious and philanthropic associations separate from the more prosperous French- and German-Jewish dominated official *Communauté Israélite de Bruxelles*.[10]

before 1940" (University of Antwerp – Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2020), under the guidance of Prof. dr. Herman Van Goethem and Prof. dr. Jean-Philippe Schreiber, to whom I am deeply thankful. I also would like to express my thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions in improving this article.

6 Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 111, 116, 121.

7 Wallet, "Belgian Independence, Orangism, and Jewish identity",167-81.

8 Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique*, 208, 211.

9 At certain points in the nineteenth century Dutch Jews in Brussels formed a demographic majority but remained underrepresented in the leading positions of the 'official' Jewish institutions such as the Communauté Israélite de Bruxelles and its charity organizations which were occupied by more prosperous German or French Jews.

10 Schreiber, *Politique et Religion*, 100-101. ; Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 417-418.; Similarly Jewish philanthropic organizations, such as the *Cercle des Amis Israélites* (created in 1860), *l'Egalité*, *Vooruitgang*, and *Menachem Avelim* were created which remained independent from those created around the Consistory; many of them were run by Dutch Jews.; (see: Frank, "La bienfaisance Israélite à Bruxelles", 285.; YIVO, Territorial Collection (Vilna Online Archives), RG 33, Box 3, Folder 17, Belgium – Israelite Friends Circle, 1889-1900.).

The reasons for Dutch Jewish immigration to Belgium, their socio-economic positions and religious life in the nineteenth century have been explored in the works of Jean-Philippe Schreiber and Cilli Kasper-Holtkotte.[11] This article will focus on Dutch Jewish life during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Only the city of Antwerp will be discussed; the city with the largest and most dynamic Dutch Jewish community during this period. Dutch Jewish migration to Brussels and cities with smaller Jewish communities such as Ghent or Liège, although interesting, falls outside the scope of this article.[12] Questions will be asked on how Dutch Jews negotiated spaces in Antwerp's Jewish society in which they could express their distinctive Dutch Jewish identities. Their relations with Eastern European Jews, who during this period became the dominant group, will be discussed and analysed. The contact with Eastern European Jews, and the minority position of Dutch Jews in Antwerp, give some important insights as to how Dutch Jews perceived their own culture and 'Jewishness'. Totally foreign to the realities in their native Netherlands, where Eastern European Jews in the twentieth century only formed a marginal minority within the Jewish population, Dutch Jews living in Antwerp were confronted with their own distinctiveness and were compelled to ask the difficult question as to what united and separated them from their Eastern European 'cousins'. As we will see, the way in which Dutch Jews attempted to answer and negotiate this question took on different forms.

1880-1914: The first Eastern European Jewish immigration wave, the loss of influence and separation

The period between 1880 and the start of the First World War was one of rapid demographic growth of Belgium's Jewish population. By 1914 Belgium's Jewish population had almost quadrupled since 1890 and was close to reaching 40,000 individuals.[13] While the majority of the Jewish immigrants arriving during this period came from Eastern Europe (Austrian Galicia or the Pale of Settlement), Dutch Jews as well continued to arrive in Belgium. Although in relative numbers the total share of Dutch Jews among the Jewish

11 Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues* .; Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique.*

12 For information on the Dutch Jewish population in Brussels in the 1930s, see: Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Private Collection Izak (Isaac) Haim Prins – P87, 57 b.

13 Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique,* 203-209.; Bok, "Considérations sur les estimations quantitatives", 90-104.

immigrant population decreased significantly, in absolute numbers Dutch Jewish immigration most likely intensified during this period, although exact numbers are hard to come by given that in Belgium religious or ethnical affiliation is not registered.

The city of Antwerp would attract the majority of Dutch Jewish immigrants between the years 1880-1914. The central role of the diamond industry as a powerful pull factor cannot be overstated. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Antwerp rivalled the then-dominant diamond centre of Amsterdam. The arrival of Jewish diamond merchants from Austro-Hungarian Galicia and the Russian Empire (and to a lesser degree from the Ottoman Empire) from the late nineteenth century onwards gave the industry an enormous impulse.[14] Similarly, Dutch Jews left their native Amsterdam to trade the precious stones in the city on the Scheldt. In Antwerp, Jews would achieve an almost complete monopoly in the commerce of diamonds. The industry not only attracted Jewish diamond merchants but also Jewish labourers active in sawing, cutting and polishing the rough stones. In 1897 some 400 Jewish labourers were employed in the diamond industry, and by 1914 this number had grown to around a 1000, representing some fifteen per cent of the total labour force in the industry.[15] Dutch Jewish diamond workers settled in Antwerp in large numbers to escape the fiscal pressures suffocating the diamond industry in Amsterdam. In 1910, some 1697 Dutch citizens (Jews and non-Jews), the overwhelming majority of them men, were active in the diamond industry in Belgium (Antwerp).[16] They made up a large portion of the high-skilled work force.[17] The lower skill tasks were taken up by Eastern European Jewish (trans)migrants, some of them to pay for their passage onwards to America.[18] Next to labourers, many more made their living from the industry, offering side services, selling materials and tools for diamond workers, or operating as brokers. Besides the diamond industry, Dutch and Eastern European Jews were also economically active in providing alimentary and other products for the rapidly growing Jewish population of the city. Antwerp's Jewish community increased from some 1200 individuals in 1880, to 8000-10,000 in 1902, and

14 Laureys, *Meesters van het diamant,* 23, 58-60.

15 Laureys, *Meesters van het diamant*, 51.; Liberman, *L'industrie et le commerce diamantaires Belges*, 40.

16 *Population, recensement général*, 677.

17 Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique*, 261.

18 See for instance: "Der yudisher durkhvanderer in belgye", *Der yudisher emigrant*, 14 Dekabr [December], 1912, 2-3.

20,000 in 1914.[19] Peddling and hawking remained an important occupation among the lowest economic strata.[20]

The mass arrival of Jewish immigrants in the years 1880-1914 resulted in great changes in the geographic concentration of Jewish life in the city. While previously Jews had lived dispersed throughout Antwerp, now a distinguishable 'Jewish quarter' began to develop in the area around the Central Train Station, close to the diamond district.[21] In this area Jews from all nationalities, recent arrivals to the city, settled down. Initially Dutch Jews made up a significant portion of the Jewish immigrant population here. In certain parts of the new 'Jewish quarter' a distinct Dutch Jewish character could be distinguished.[22] The continuing arrival of Eastern European immigrants, however, which reached its height between the years 1906-1914, precipitated profound changes. One Dutch Jewish immigrant in 1913 for instance observed that:

> *'The well-known Jewish quarter such as the Kievitstraat and the adjoining Leeuwerik, Lente, and Zomerstraten, formerly the "environment" of the Dutch Jews, who ran several retail stores there, has gradually lost its peculiar character. Grocery shops, butcher's shops, etc. are being replaced by other businesses run by our Russian and Austrian co-religionists* [...] *the Dutch element in these centres is losing more and more ground and the few butcher's shops and grocery shops which remained have been continued by other co-religionists or have been replaced by them with some other sort of business'.*[23]

Yiddish shop signs, advertising all kinds of businesses now came to dominate the street view. Contemporary Eastern European immigrants who just arrived in Antwerp or were passing through the city, could not help but to remark on Antwerp's '*haymishe'* character.[24]

19 Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad*, 10-12.

20 Ronin, *Antwerpen en zijn 'Russen',* 279-280.

21 Vanden Daelen, "In the Port City we meet?", 75-78.

22 What this Dutch Jewish character looked like is expanded upon in the article "The Dutch Jewish colony: between perception and reality".

23 "Antwerpen", *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* (henceforth NIW), November 21, 1913, 3.

24 For a contemporary description of Antwerp's Jewish neighbourhood see: "Der idisher kvartal in der diamanten-shtadt", *Forverts*, September 17, 1912, 5.; For more literary recollections of Jewish immigrants first impression of Antwerp, see also Coolen, *Israël mon voisin*, 101-118.

Dutch Jews and religious life: the creation of the NIG and the Dutch Jewish colony

The relative demographic decline of Dutch Jews in Antwerp's Jewish population was accompanied by a loss of influence in the city's official religious institutions. Dutch Jews had played a dominant role in the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen* in the nineteenth century. David Samuel Hirsch, for instance, a native of Amsterdam, had been the long-serving rabbi (*ministre-officiant*) of the small Jewish congregation first at the *Pieter Potstraat* and later at the monumental *'Hollandse sjoel'* at the *Bouwmeesterstraat* until he retired in 1904.[25] Around the turn of the century Eastern European Jews joined the community in ever greater numbers. While Eastern European Jewish immigrants established private oratories and a 'rival' community of their own — which took on the name *Machsike Hadass* — less strictly orthodox and generally more wealthy Eastern European Jews (many of them prosperous diamond merchants) opted to join the official *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen*. There they soon occupied important positions and joined the Dutch-German Jewish communal establishment. This influx gradually transformed the socio-religious character of the community. While previously, Dutch had served as the primary language in the sermons and in the religious education of the youth, now French and especially German gradually began to take its place. German had long since served as the cultural language preferred by the economic elites of the Jews coming from Austrian Galicia.[26] After the retirement of David Samuel Hirsch, the line of rabbis of Dutch nationality was broken when Joseph Wiener, a French and German-speaking Jew from the Alsace, was elected as the community's chief rabbi; an appointment which symbolised the changing character of the community.[27]

Among Dutch Jews, these changes led to discontent. Further adding to the general dissatisfaction was the physical distance of the *'Hollandse sjoel'* located at *'t Zuid*, from the new Jewish quarter around the Central Train Station located a mile and a half to the northeast. Many of the religiously observant Dutch Jews who arrived in Antwerp around the turn of the century

25 Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 165-166.

26 "Een nieuwe Israëlietische Gemeente", *NIW*, March 31, 1905, 2.; "Een interview", *De Nieuwe Luchter, Periodiek Orgaan voor het Joodsche Huisgezin*, November, 1926, 3.; Many of the Galician Jews used German (and to a lesser degree French) as their cultural language. The Zionist periodical Hatikwah, published in Antwerp during this period, was written in German and French for instance.

27 For a biography of rabbi David Samuel Hirsch and Joseph Wiener see Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique,* 165, 362-363.

also were more conservative. While the *Israëlietische Gemeente* had never gone as far in its religious reforms as its counterpart in Brussels, still some adaptions had been introduced and among a small minority vocal advocates could be found for more far-reaching reforms. In 1905 for instance, some members privately started collecting funds for the purchase of an organ to be used during the sabbath services, a highly divisive symbol of Reform Judaism.[28] While the proposal was subsequently vetoed by the majority of the community, it nonetheless alienated orthodox Jews among both Dutch and Eastern European Jewish immigrants.

In 1905 a group of Dutch Jews founded an independent break-away community which they aptly called the *Nieuwe Israëlietische Gemeente*. Two years later the community changed its name to the more representative *Nederlandsche Israëlietische Gemeente te Antwerpen* (NIG).[29] Little is known about the Dutch members who broke away from the 'official community' or the pioneers who created the NIG. No membership lists of the community have survived and the sources remain somewhat vague as to the professional or socio-economic background of its members. An analysis of the profile of some of the functionaries active in the board of the community, whose names do appear in the sources, however, reveals that most arrived in Belgium around the turn of the century and generally could be found among the lower (middle) classes.[30] Jacques (Jaak) Hertogs, a native of *Susteren* in

28 "A brif in redaktsye (Dr. Jozef Wiener)", *Di yidishe prese*, April 22, 1927, 3. In other accounts mention is made of an organ in the *Hollandse sjoel*, which was however only used during weddings and not during shabbat services or other religious celebrations. ("Antwerpen", *NIW*, February 7, 1908, 6.).

29 Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique,* 143-144.; NIW, "Een Nieuwe Israëlietische Gemeente", NIW, March 31, 1905, 2.

30 Calman [Karel] Koekoek (Rotterdam, 31-07-1867) arrived in Antwerp in 1902 and served as a travelling salesman, (Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 481#102936). Jacques Van Stratum (Eindhoven, 20-04-1855) arrived in Antwerp 1897 and ran a grocery shop. (Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 481#88636). His son Henri Van Stratum (Eindhoven, 28-08-1882) arrived with his father in 1897 and was a merchant (koopman). (Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 481#170730). Arnold Swalf (Rotterdam, 02-09-1869) arrived in Berchem in 1895 and was employed as a diamond worker. (Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 968#18300). Hyman Jacob Con (Amsterdam, 21-03-1859) arrived in 1897 and was an engineer. (Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 481#90801). Jacques (Jaak) Hertogs (?, 22-06-1850) arrived in Antwerp in 1894 and was a horse trader. (Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 481#79804). Alexander Vander Horst (Hoogeveen, 16-01-1881), arrived in 1907 and made his living as a religious teacher (Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 481#122839). Jacob Mok, (Haarlem, 08-12-1875) arrived in Antwerp in 1903 and was a traveling salesman and for a while cantor at the NIG. (Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA), Vreemdelingenpolitie, Individuele dossiers, F 1649, 732970).

Dutch Limburg and horse trader by profession, served as the president of the community.[31] Alexander Van Der Horst, a native of *Hoogeveen* who arrived in Belgium in 1907, served as the as the community's cantor, religious teacher and *shokhet* until 1910 when he left for Uccle, Brussels.[32] Soon the NIG numbered some 160 families. In 1907 it festively opened an oratory at the *Lentestraat* in *Zurenborg*, a neighbourhood in the south-east of Antwerp close to the Central Train Station where a large part of the Dutch Jewish population was concentrated.[33]

Relations between the NIG and the 'official' *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen* were marked by mutual mistrust and tensions. In 1908, a fierce *shekhitah* conflict erupted after the NIG, considering the meat sold by butchers under the authority of the other community as not kosher enough, claimed the right to supervise its own butcher (and levy taxes). This triggered a fierce clash in which even Dutch rabbis across the border became involved, and eventually the NIG was forced to back down.[34] For its part, the *Israëlietische Gemeente* pressured the Consistory in Brussels to deny the official recognition of the Dutch community. In this case, they achieved a welcome victory, having previously failed to prevent the successful bids of the Community of Russian and Polish Rites, *Machsike Hadass* and the Sephardic (Turkish) community, which were both recognized in 1910.[35] It is important to stress, however, that many Dutch Jews continued to form part of the membership of the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen*. Dutch Jews such as Simon Aptroot, a native of Leek, Groningen, who arrived

31 "De inwijding der Nieuwe Synagoge van de Ned. Isr. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *NIW*, December 20, 1907, 3. (NIW January 24, 1908, 3. ; NIW September 4, 1908, 6.).

32 "Antwerpen", *NIW*, September 6, 1907, 2. Van Der Horst subsequently became one of the most active figures in Jewish life in the interwar period. He served as a functionary in various Zionist organizations in Brussels and Antwerp, as secretary general in Antwerp's federal philanthropic association, the *Centrale*, and in various anti-Nazi propaganda associations. He was a prolific author of tractates and books. For a short autobiography see Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 346-347. Schreiber, however, wrongly asserts that Van Der Horst served as the ministre-officiant of the 'official' *Israelietische Gemeente van Antwerpen*, while in fact he occupied this post at the rival 'Dutch' community. Van Der Horst would be the central figure in the fierce *shekhitah* debate between the two religious communities, and his departure to Brussels in 1910 was most likely a result of being at the losing end of this conflict.

33 "De inwijding der Nieuwe synagoge van de Ned. Isr. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *NIW*, December 20, 1907, 3.; Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA), Archives du SPF Justice. Service des Cultes et de la Laïcité. Dossiers du Culte israélite. n° 67.

34 "Antwerpen", *NIW*, February 7, 1908, 6.; "De Antwerpsche Sjechieto-kwestie", *NIW*, February 14, 1908, 2.; *"De Sjechitoh-quaestie in Antwerpen", NIW*, February 21, 1908, 3, 5.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, March 6, 1908, 2. ; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, April 3, 1908, 2.

35 J.P. Schreiber, *Politique et Religion*, 369.

in Antwerp in 1907, would serve as the long-time secretary of the community in the following decades. Similarly, the architect Joseph de Lange, a native of Amsterdam, who arrived as a thirteen-year-old in Antwerp in 1896, continued to serve in its committees.[36] While personal reasons, such as a preference for the less strict 'orthodox' character practiced at the synagogue of the Bouwmeesterstraat, or even practical reasons such as its proximity closer to the family home, may have guided these choices, it does seem likely that those (religiously-active) Dutch Jews who were better integrated in Antwerp's bourgeois Jewish society, those who were higher up on the socio-economic ladder, preferred the grandeur and prestige of the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen* where they could associate with their (socio-economic) peers.

The oratory of the NIG at the *Lentestraat* became a centre of organized Dutch Jewish life. It operated a small (supplementary) Jewish religious school which provided religious education to some 60 students.[37] A women's association, *Malbouschei Gewoud,* as well as cultural associations such as the theatre group *Nut en Genoegen* — initiated by the young Eliazer Swaan whom we will meet again later — and the more high-minded dance, theatre, and song association *Eendracht maakt Macht* further augmented what was soon referred to as the 'Dutch Jewish colony'.[38] Likewise, many of the notables who served on the board of NIG (among them Henri Frechie), were also active in one of the oldest Dutch Jewish organizations in the city, the *Nederlandse Israëlietische begrafenisvereeniging 'Antwerpen'* (later known as the *Israëlietische begrafenisvereeniging 'Antwerpen'* and more generally known as the *Frechie Stichting*). Established in 1884, it became the first Jewish funeral (aid) organization to establish a permanent funeral plot in the Dutch village of *Putte* right across the border in 1910.[39] The views and

36 For a short biography on these figures, see Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique,* 32, 86-87.

37 "De inwijding der Nieuwe synagoge van de Ned. Isr. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *NIW*, December 20, 1907, 3.

38 "Antwerpen", *NIW*, September 25, 1908, 10.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, October 27, 1911, 5.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, December 22, 1911, 11.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, November 29, 1912, 10.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, February 9, 1912, 3.; I have systematically used the original Latin alphabet spelling of Hebrew and Yiddish names of organizations as they appeared in the sources at the time. There was a great variety in the way Hebrew and Yiddish names were transcribed to the Latin alphabet, depending on the national and cultural origins (East European Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Dutch Jewish institutions) of the Jewish groups in question. For Yiddish titles of articles in the footnotes; I have used the YIVO system for transliteration but have maintained the original spelling even when inconsistent with modern YIVO standard.

39 For a brief history of the organization, see: *Frechie stichting, 1884-1984*, (Antwerpen: Frechie stichting, self-published, 1984). "De Ned. Is. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *De Vrijdagavond*,

perspectives of Dutch Jews were also reflected in periodicals such as the *Israëlietisch Weekblad voor België*, edited by Jacob Mok, which appeared between 1905 and 1907 or *Juda Weekblad voor Joodsche Belangen*, edited by Alexander Van Der Horst, in 1908.[40] By the eve of the First World War, Dutch Jews had established a series of religious and socio-cultural institutions which set them apart as a distinct subcommunity within the city's Jewish population. These institutions would form the nucleus of the Dutch Jewish colony as it developed in the interwar period.

The Interwar period: the second Eastern European Jewish immigration wave, dialogue, embeddedness and autonomy.

During the interwar period many of the pre-war historical developments continued and even intensified. In relation to the overall Jewish population of Belgium, Dutch Jews became a smaller minority in Belgian Jewish society, which now increasingly reflected Eastern European Jewish life. The arrival of tens of thousands of poor Eastern European Jews in the 1920s drastically accelerated the profound changes which had been transforming Jewish life since the decade leading up to the First World War. New Jewish religious traditions (Chassidism) as well as forms of political (Zionism, Left-wing Jewish activism) and cultural (Yiddishism, Hebraism) activism now came to characterize this small Eastern European Jewish world transplanted to the heart of Western Europe.[41] Dutch Jews living in Belgium once again had to come to terms with their position in Jewish communal life and had to define their relations with the Eastern European Jewish community(ies). This they did in various ways, going beyond the mere 'separation' that had characterized their attitudes prior to the First World War.

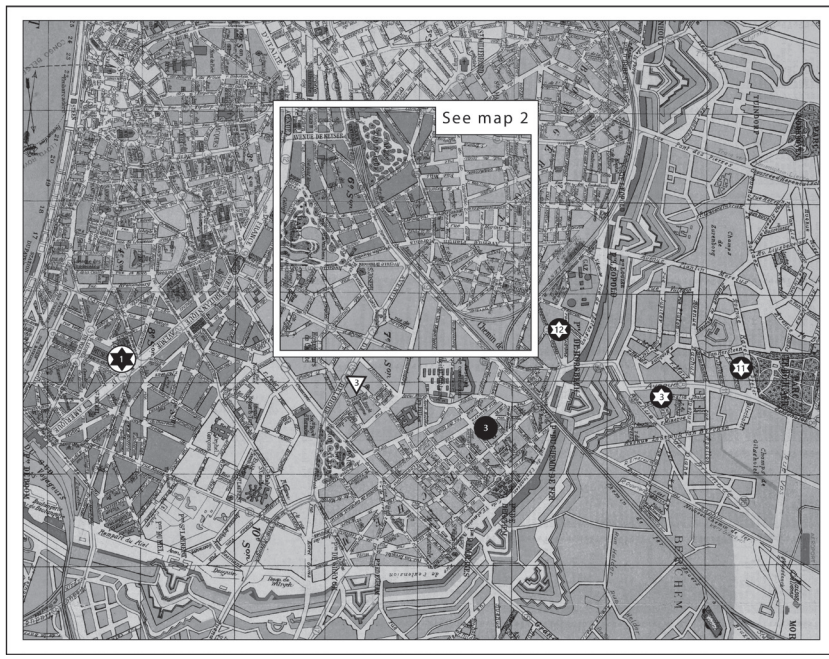
Like the majority of Antwerp's Jewish population, Dutch Jews who had resided in Antwerp at the start of the First World War left the city and spent the war years in the Netherlands.[42] In the immediate years following the

September 3, 1926, 362-363.; In 1910 the Eastern European Jewish community Machsike Hadass followed its example, and in 1920 the funeral society of the *Israelietische Gemeente van Antwerpen* also established a permanent concession in Putte.

40 Jacob Mok most likely is the same J. Mok who acted as the *ministre officiant* prior to the installation of Alexander Van Der Horst to this post. ("Antwerpen", *NIW*, May 5, 1905, 2.). Only a few issues of both periodicals, however, have survived.

41 For an overview of the developments in Belgian Jewish life in the early twentieth century see Stamberger, "Jewish Migration and the Making of a Belgian Jewry".

42 Stamberger, "The 'Belgian' Jewish Experience", 98, 105-7.



MAP 1: A view of the city of Antwerp with Jewish organizations located outside the 'Jewish neighbourhood' in 1939.

armistice however, many returned to Antwerp (while others arrived for the first time) after Antwerp's diamond industry made a rapid recovery. According to a writer in Antwerp's Dutch Jewish weekly, *Ons Orgaan*, at least 80 per cent of the 'Dutch Jewish colony' made their living from the industry during the mid-1920s.[43] By the end of the decade, one contemporary source estimated the 'Dutch Jewish colony' in Antwerp at some 8500 individuals; elsewhere however much lower estimates are given. H. Tsvir [Herman Jacubowitz], the editor of *Di yidishe prese*, for instance, estimated the number of Dutch Jews in Antwerp at some 4000.[44] Dutch Jews certainly represented a significant minority in the city's overall Dutch immigrant population which counted 19,745 individuals in 1930.[45]

43 *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, April 19, 1924, 4.

44 "Een Nederlandsch Israëlietisch Ziekenhuis te Antwerpen?", *De vrijdagavond, Joodsch Weekblad*, July 13, 1928, 235.; "Yudishe shpitol oder yudishe shpiteler?", *Di yidishe prese*, May 11, 1928, 2.

45 *Bevolking, Algemene telling op 31 december 1930,* 88.

MAP 2: The area of the Jewish neighbourhood in Antwerp in parts of the 6th and 7th quarter of the city, with some of the most prominent Jewish organizations in 1939.

The Dutch Jewish colony: between perception and reality

It is important to note that the Dutch Jewish colony did not denote a geographic location. Dutch Jews lived intermingled with Eastern European Jews, Jewish and non-Jewish Belgians, and others in the 'Jewish quarter' in the 6th and 7th quarter of Antwerp. Their socio-economic status often determined in which area or street they lived. The generally higher socio-economic position of Dutch Jews in comparison with the Eastern European Jewish community meant that they were overrepresented (together with Jews with Belgian nationality) in the area around the *Gitschotellei* in *Berchem.* This more spacious and green suburban area in the late 1920s attracted Jews who experienced a degree of upward social mobility and subsequently left the 'Jewish quarter'.[46] In the interwar period new oratories, such as Ahavat

46 Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad*, 24.; Vanden Daelen, "In the port city", 80.

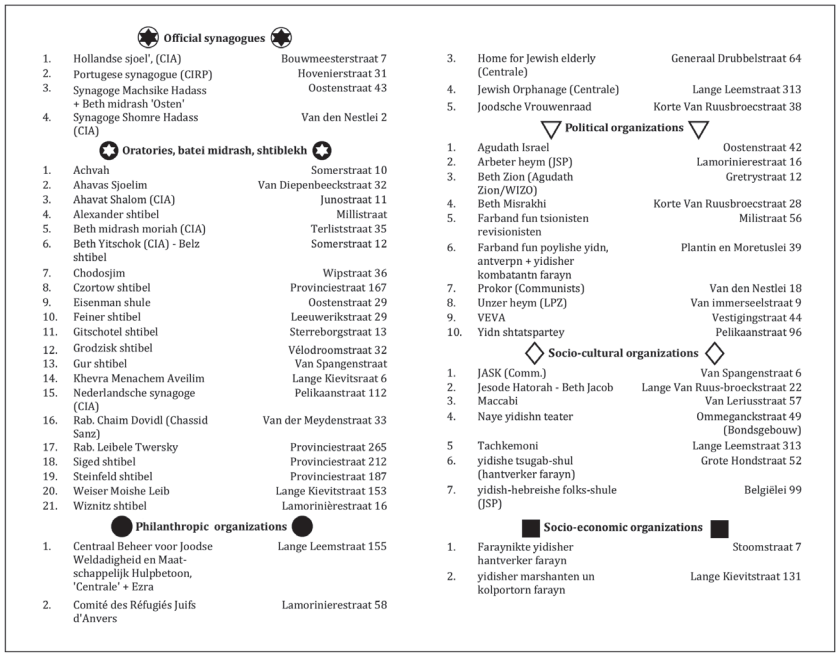


Figure 1: Main Jewish organizations in 1939 and their adresses.
CIA: Communauté Israélite d'Anvers/Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen; CIRP: Communauté israélite de rite portugais; Comm. : Communists ; JSP : (United) Jewish Socialist Party, Poale Zion-Zeire Zion; LPZ: Linke Poale Zion.

Shalom or the Gitschotel shtibel (see Map 1), were established to cater to the spiritual needs of the inhabitants of this new 'Jewish' residential area. Similarly, the boundaries between the 'Dutch Jewish colony' and the rest of Jewish society are not always easily drawn and by no means absolute. Dutch Jews and Eastern European Jews were in close contact with each other, which is not at all surprising given their proximity in the same neighbourhoods. They often prayed in the same oratories and synagogues (depending on social class) and were confronted with similar issues facing the Jewish community. While statistical data on intermarriage between Dutch Jews and Eastern European Jews is entirely missing, a preliminary examination of the 'Alien files' of Dutch Jews, compiled by the Belgian '*Vreemdelingenpolitie*' (Alien's Police), show that this was a rare occurrence.[47] Both Dutch and Eastern European Jews preferred to marry within their own national communities.

47 See the individual files compiled by the Aliens' Police in Felix archief Antwerp or in the General State Archives in Brussels.

While the 'Dutch Jewish colony' did not represent a geographic location or a clear-cut descriptive reality, it was nonetheless a recognized categorization used both by Dutch Jews themselves and among Eastern European Jews; it represented a distinct (sub-) community within Antwerp's Jewish society with its own religious traditions, dietary customs, language and culture. The three centuries of uninterrupted Jewish life in the Netherlands had created a specific Dutch Jewish culture which differed significantly from that of the newly arrived Eastern European immigrants. During the Jewish holiday of Passover, for instance, Dutch and Eastern European Jewish shops in Antwerp could clearly be distinguished:

> *'Since last week the shops of our Polish coreligionists have been supplied with the well-known boxes of square matzos, wine from Palestine, horseradish and haggadahs, while Dutch shopkeepers have only stocked the traditional Amsterdam Passover bread with the well-known "Haantje"* [*which were round following Sephardic tradition which influenced Jewish life in the Netherlands*]*, as well as all kinds of articles, such as sweets, chocolate, etc., made under the supervision of the Amsterdam rabbinate'.*[48]

To cater to their specific tastes, Dutch Jews, like Eastern European Jews, recreated a little bit of home in Antwerp. In the '*Hollandsche Beenhouwerij*' (Dutch butcher shop) or '*Hollandsche bakkerij*' (Dutch bakery) Dutch (Jewish) specialties were sold under strict rabbinic supervision. Similarly, in Dutch Jewish food stores 'fine Dutch cheese and butter' were carefully displayed for eager customers.[49] Whereas a weary *landsman* freshly arrived from distant Poland could rejoice at familiar dishes such as *cholent*, served at the many Eastern European Jewish eateries and restaurants located in Antwerp's Jewish neighbourhood, the sight of '*burgerstamppot, boerenkool met worst*' or '*groene erwtensoep*' served in Dutch Jewish restaurants, whetted the appetites of Dutch Jews living (or passing through) the city.[50] Of the 247 enterprises run by Jews of Dutch nationality in Belgium — the largest part of which were located in the diamond industry — at the end of the interwar period, some 27 were butcheries, bakeries or alimentary shops, the majority of them located in Antwerp.[51] Dutch Jewish immigrants were intimately tied to the Netherlands, their Dutch (Jewish) culture and the Dutch state.

48 "Brief uit Antwerpen", *NIW*, April 18, 1930, 12.

49 *Machanei Jisroeil*, April 20, 1929, 4.; *De Nieuwe luchter*, July, 1926, 4.

50 "Gerrit Beem-Antwerpen", *NIW*, November 19, 1937, 3.

51 Meyer, Meinen, "Immigrés juifs dans l'économie belge", 43.

During national celebrations across the border, such as the 40-year jubilee of Queen Wilhelmina in 1938, religious festivities were held in the Dutch oratory in Antwerp in the presence of the Dutch consul.[52]

In the specific context of Antwerp, language was another factor distinguishing the Dutch Jews. While the Eastern European Jewish elite which had immigrated before the First World War often adopted French (German went out of use after the First World War when anti-German sentiment in Belgian society was strong) as their language of communication and the new immigrants arriving after the war mainly communicated in Yiddish, Dutch Jews spoke Dutch and only Dutch as the use of Yiddish and Portuguese had largely disappeared in the nineteenth century when Dutch Jewry completed its process of acculturation.

While their Dutch (Jewish) culture thus set Dutch Jews apart from the Eastern European Jewish community, their Jewishness set them apart from their Christian immigrant compatriots in Antwerp. Dutch Jewish institutions, for instance, were not aligned with the *Bond van Nederlandsche Vereenigingen en Lichamen in België* (Union of Dutch associations and corporations in Belgium) which exclusively organized Protestant Dutch associations in Belgium.[53] As such, the institutional separations between 'Christian' (Protestant) and Jewish life in the Netherlands were transplanted across the border, even when interpersonal relations most likely followed a less rigorous pattern.

It is equally important to recognize that the Dutch Jewish colony in Antwerp during the interwar period was far from a monolithic bloc and in miniature mirrored Jewish life of the Netherlands: an Ashkenazi majority and small Sephardic minority, rich and poor, a large body of semi-secular and a minority of traditional orthodox Jews. Indeed, as in the Netherlands, most Dutch Jewish immigrants were not active in Jewish religious or communal life. 'Once they [Dutch Jews] have crossed the *Moerdijk* they forget everything' was but one of the complaints expressed by those who were communally active of the supposed inactivity of Dutch Jews living in Belgium.[54] These lamentations were also extended to Dutch Jewish children growing up in Belgium who, according to one author, grew up 'a fourth […] Jew, a fourth Dutch, a the third quarter Belgian, and the last quarter air […]

52 "Feestviering in de Nederlandsche Synagoge te Antwerpen", *Hollandsch Weekblad*, September 17, 1938, 36.; "Antwerpsche brieven", *De Joodse middenstander*, February 19, 1937, 22.

53 *Hollandsch Weekblad voor België*, March 11, 1933, 3-5.

54 "Wat voelen de Hollandsche Joden te Antwerpen voor hun Jodendom", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, February, 1927, 1-2.

cosmopolitan' which, so the stern verdict went, together amounted to not much, 'given that they are not whole'.[55]

Dutch perspectives on Antwerp's Eastern European Jews

The diversity within the Dutch Jewish colony not only determined the relations among Dutch Jew themselves but also informed their attitudes and views towards the Eastern European Jewish majority in Antwerp. Among wealthier Dutch Jews, the more acculturated, and the less religiously active, the '*Oostjoden*' and their particularities were regarded with suspicion. On the one hand, poor recently arrived Eastern European Jews were seen as a source of embarrassment. Their poverty, distinct ethnic and cultural particularities, as well as their excessive religious and political zeal, and their seeming unwillingness to acculturate were regarded as entirely unsuitable for life in a Western European metropolis and as a potential risk, since it could provoke anti-Jewish feelings; a view they shared with the Belgian Jewish establishment. On the other hand, the tendency of the accultured Eastern European Jewish bourgeoisie in Antwerp to use French as their cultural language, and their at times dismissive attitude towards the Dutch language and the Flemish Movement, was regarded by many Dutch Jews as a case of serious snobbery and a dangerous refusal to assimilate to local Flemish society.[56] Dutch Jews in general had been more sympathetic to the sensitivities of the Flemish Movement than most Eastern European Jews. Around the turn of the century several Dutch Jews, for instance, could be found in nationalist Flemish (student) circles.[57]

Among more communally or religiously active Dutch Jews, more positive views and attitudes towards the *Oostjoden* could be found. Especially the profound religious knowledge of Eastern European Jewry was regarded with admiration by orthodox Dutch Jews living in Belgium. These views likely preceded their arrival to Belgium. Since during the First World War Antwerp's Eastern European Jewish community had found a refuge in *Scheveningen*, close ties had been formed between orthodox Jews on both sides of the border.[58] In orthodox circles in the Netherlands in the interwar period the 'authentic'

55 "Wat voelen de Hollandsche Joden te Antwerpen voor hun Jodendom", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, March, 1927, 1.

56 "De Palestinaweek in het kunstverbond", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, January, 1927, 2.; "Het Belgische Jodendom en zijn toekomst", *De Vrijdagavond*, October 9, 1931, 18.; "Het Belgische Jodendom en zijn toekomst", *De Vrijdagavond*, November 6, 1931, 88.

57 Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad*, 79-80.; Brachfeld, *Het Grote Brabosh Memorbook*, 72-77.

58 Stamberger, "The 'Belgian' Jewish experience", 104-105.

Eastern European Jewish religious culture in Antwerp, the creation of a *yeshivah* in Heide (a village near Antwerp) modelled on the Eastern European *yeshivot* (Dutch Jewish youth also attended this religious school) was followed with great interest.[59] This rapprochement was also expressed in ties between the orthodox political party *Agudath Israel* in Belgium and the Netherlands. In the mid-1930s its youth organizations *Tzeire Agudath Israel* published a joint Dutch language periodical, *Moriah, orgaan van de Agoedistische jeugdbeweging in Nederland en België*.[60] In the Netherlands the contact of Dutch Jewish youth with their Eastern European orthodox peers across the border even led to a limited 'traditionalist revival', as certain aspects of Eastern European Jewish religious (Chassidic) culture made their way into Dutch orthodox groups.[61]

Similarly, among the small group of Dutch Zionists and political activists the zeal and political mobilizing force of Eastern European Jews was much admired. It is no coincidence that Dutch Jewish Zionist activists in Belgium such as Izak Prins, Alexander Van Der Horst or Gustaaf Hildesheim often felt a close kinship with the 'Eastern [European] Jewish soul'.[62] The majority of Dutch Jews living in Belgium, however, remained aloof of the Zionist movement. At the end of the 1930s, the Jewish National Fund in Belgium even saw itself forced to undertake an action specifically tailored to persuade Dutch Jews to become involved in its fundraising efforts.[63] This was not only true for Zionist activism but for most forms of Jewish political activity in which Dutch Jews, if at all, only played second fiddle. The general passivism of Dutch Jews drew the ire and strong criticism of politically-active Dutch Jewish commentators in the Jewish press, such as for instance Izak Prins,

59 For descriptions by Dutch Jewish youth attending the yeshivah, see the series of articles entitled "De Oost Joden" in *Hameaged, Orgaan voor traditioneel Jodendom, Maandblad van de Nederlandsche Agoedas Jisroeil jeugdorganisatie*.; "De Jeschiewa etz chaim te Heide", *De Vrijdagavond*, June 5, 1931, 148-151.; "Opening eener Jeschiwo the Heide", *NIW*, July 7, 1930, 12.

60 Several issues of the periodical can be found in the Orthodox Archives in New York (File D.16).

61 This for instance can be seen in the following statement from a Dutch *Tzeire Agudath Israel* member who wrote an article on the time he spent in the *Yeshivah* in Heide and recalled that after Friday service for shabbes the rosh hayeshivah: '…grabs a few boys by the hand and they dance. All possible things are sung, many of the nigunim fortunately have already made their way to the Nederlandsche Agoedo [Dutch Agudath Israel].' ("De Oost Joden", *Hameaged, Orgaan voor traditioneel Jodendom, Maandblad van de Nederlandsche Agoedas Jisroeil jeugdorganisatie*, Heshvan, 5701, 10.).

62 "Gustaaf Hildesheim", *Goal*, February, 1939, 9.

63 "Zionisme en de Nederlandse Joden te Antwerpen", *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, February 1, 1924, 3.; "Notre departement Neerlandais", *Goal*, 10-11, August-September, 1938, 5.; One exception is the Zionist association *Geoullah* which atypically was established on the initiative of two Dutch Jews in 1939.; *Geoulah, maandblad van de Algemeene Joodse Eenheidsbeweging*, januari, 1939.; See also: Provincial State Archives Beveren, PK 2001 C, N° 1907, Geoelah.

Alexander Van Der Horst, and later Siegfried van Praag and his wife Hilda van Praag-Sanders after they moved to Brussels in 1936.[64] The fact that Zionism, left-wing activism and cultural activism followed the beats and rhythms of Eastern European Jewish (political) life with its emphasis on Yiddish (political) culture likely served as an obstacle for many Dutch Jews to become involved.

The NIG, its changing institutional ties, and Dutch Jewish institutions

As in the period prior to the First World War, Dutch Jews (re)created their own institutions. In 1920 the Dutch Jewish religious community was reestablished first under the name *Nederlandsch Israëlietische Vereeniging Sjewes Achim,* and later under its original name, the *Nederlandsche Israëlietische Gemeente* (NIG).[65] A central figure in its early post-war history was Eliazer Swaan, whom we have come across before as the founder of the pre-war theatre company *Eendracht maakt Macht*. Having spent the war years in his native *'s Gravenhage*, he returned to Belgium in 1919 and together with other Dutch Jews re-established the NIG. For most of the 1920s Eliazer Swaan served in the committees of the community and acted as its *mohel*, while earning his living by running a butcher shop in de *Somerstraat*.[66] The post of *ministre-officiant* (*chazan*) and head teacher of the small religious school was accorded to Ephraim Mordechai Kleerekoper, a native from Amsterdam who arrived in Antwerp in 1920.[67] The continued Dutch Jewish immigration in the 1920s led to a rapid expansion of the community which by the middle of the decade was estimated to number some 600-700 members.[68] During the 1920s, the community's oratory was located at the *Leeuwerikstraat* 43, in a working

64 "Antwerpsche brieven, XXIV", *De Joodsche Middenstander,* July 7, 1939, 12.; "Joods leven in Brussel", *Ha'Isha*, March, 1938, 56-57. ; CAHJP, Private Collection Izak (Isaac) Haim Prins – P87, 57 b.

65 "Uit Antwerpen", *NIW*, May 28, 1920, 6.; "Zou het lukken?", Ons orgaan, December 22, 1923, 2.; "Een interview", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, November, 1926, 3.; "Zou het lukken?", *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, December 22, 1923, 2.

66 Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 481#142034.; "E. Swaan", *NIZA, Officieel Orgaan der Nederlandsche Ziekeninrichting*, November 6, 1928, 11.; "De Ned. Isr. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *De Vrijdagavond, Joodsch Weekblad*, September 3, 1926, 362-363.

67 Stadsarchief Antwerpen, individuele vreemdelingendossiers, 968#20003; 481#161258.; *De Nieuwe Luchter*, September, 1927, 2.

68 "Een interview", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, November, 1926, 3.; "Nos communautés", *Hatikwah, organe périodique de la Fédération des Sionistes de Belgique*, December 3, 1926, 419.; "De Ned. Isr. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *De Vrijdagavond, Joodsch Weekblad*, September 3 1926, 362-363.

class area in the Jewish quarter.[69] Next to the Ashkenazi NIG, and in close collaboration with it, a small Dutch Sephardic community was created in the mid-1920s, which took on the name *Abodath Hakodesj*.[70] While in Antwerp a *Communauté israélite de rite portugais* had been active since 1898, its membership almost exclusively consisted of Ottoman and later Turkish and Greek Jews; its synagogue at the *Hovenierstraat* was commonly known as the 'Turkish synagogue'. Dutch Sephardic Jews living in Antwerp, with their own Dutch Jewish Sephardic culture felt ill at ease there.[71] *Abodath Hakodesj* in the late 1920s numbered some 50-60 members, and due to the lack of a prayer house of its own, rented places at other Jewish institutions such as the Jewish schools *Jesode Hatorah* and *Tachkemoni* during the high holidays.[72]

If prior to WOI, the Dutch Jewish religious community had made demarches to the Consistory to receive official recognition (and thus put its *ministre-officiant* on the state's payroll) there is little evidence that they did so in the interwar period. Realizing that such attempts were likely to be rejected, the NIG instead opted to align itself with one of the large 'official' Eastern European religious communities. This meant making a choice between two communities: the traditionalist and orthodox *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen* (*Shomre Hadass*) and the Eastern European (ultra-) orthodox *Machsike Hadass*; two communities which for much of the interwar period were at loggerheads over a variety of issues.

Initially the strict orthodox character of the NIG and its prior history with the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen* led the Dutch Jewish community to align itself with *Machsike Hadass*. The fact that many leaders of the NIG supported the orthodox party *Agudath Israel* and that *Machsike Hadass* (and its affiliated *kloyzn* and oratories) served as a stronghold of this party most likely also influenced this choice.[73] While in practice the services conducted at the Dutch oratory were performed by Ephraim Kleerekoper, it was the renowned rabbi Mordechai Rottenberg — a native of Wadowice in Poland, chief rabbi of *Machsike Hadass* and a staunch partisan of *Agudath Israel* in Antwerp — who was officially recognized as the spiritual and religious leader (*opperrabbijn*) of

69 "Plechtige inweiding van de Synagoge Ned. Isr. Vereeniging Sjewes Achim te Antwerpen", *NIW*, June 3, 1921, 3.

70 "De Portugeesche Joden te Antwerpen", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, October, 1926, 2.; "De Portugeesche sjoeldiensten over de Hooge Feestdagen", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, November, 1927, 2.; "Een plechtigheid in de P.I. Gemeente 'Abodath Hakodesj' te Antwerpen", *NIW*, October 26, 1928, 2.

71 "Een praatje met den geestelijke leider onzer zuster-gemeente te Antwerpen", *Hasefardi; jeugdorgaan van de Portugees Israël. gemeente te Amsterdam*, February 15, 1938, 14-15.

72 *NIW*, April 24 1928, pp. 3.

73 "Agoedas Jisroeil te Antwerpen", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, August, 1926, 2.

the Dutch religious community.[74] Although officially independent, its choice of chief rabbi in effect meant that NIG became closely affiliated with the network of *Machsike Hadass*. The NIG, however, closely guarded its autonomy and religious identity: the Dutch *minhag*, Dutch religious melodies, and customs such as the *parnasiembank* (a special bench in the synagogue for the leaders of the community, unfamiliar to Eastern European Jews) demarcated the Dutch house of prayer from its Eastern European counterparts.[75]

Yet the allegiance of the Dutch Jewish community to *Machsike Hadass* was based not only on principle but also on convenience. In 1931, in a dramatic shift, the Dutch Jewish community would (re)join the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen*. Material and pragmatic reasons led to this decision. By the early 1930s the NIG stood on the brink of total collapse. The Great Depression had hit the diamond industry exceptionally hard, and many Dutch Jewish immigrants decided to return to the Netherlands, depleting the funds of the community.[76] Furthermore, the community had accumulated a financial debt of some one million Belgian Francs in an (mis)adventure which perhaps can be described as emblematic of the relations between Dutch Jews and Eastern European Jews in Antwerp: the farce of the two Jewish hospitals.

The idea to establish a Jewish hospital in Antwerp to cater to the specific needs of Jewish patients had been around since the late nineteenth century.[77] Yet the project had never come to fruition. In 1926, with much fanfare, members of the NIG launched an initiative to build a large Jewish hospital in Antwerp influenced by the example of Amsterdam's Jewish hospital. The *Nederlandsche Israëlietische Ziekeninrichting te Antwerpen* (NIZA), the association set up to acquire the funds and to realize this goal, was an offshoot of the medical aid society for the members of NIG.[78]

The Dutch Jewish initiative however came at a time when in the *Centraal Beheer voor Joodse Weldadigheid* (known simply as the *Centrale*), the federative organization uniting the main Jewish philanthropic organizations in Antwerp, a similar initiative to build a Jewish hospital was launched under the aegis of *Beth Hacholim* (a subcommittee of its constituent organization *Bikur Cholim*).[79]

74 "Opperrabbijn M. Rottenberg", *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, February 9, 1924, 5.

75 "Zuid-Nederlandsch indrukken", NIW, July 8 1921, 11.

76 "Antwerpen", *NIW*, December 5, 1930, 12.

77 Frey, "Een Joodse solidariteitsbeweging te Antwerpen", 19.

78 "Over een Isr. Ziekeninrichting en nog wat," *De Nieuwe Luchter*, July, 1926, 2.; "Het wordt tijd", *NIZA, Officieel Orgaan der Nederlandsche Ziekeninrichting*, June, 1928, 1.

79 "Over een Isr. Ziekeninrichting en nog wat", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, July 1926, 3.; "Yudishe shpitol oder yudishe shpiteler?", *Di yidishe prese*, May 11, 1928, 2.; For the history of the Centrale and its

The two separate initiatives to establish a Jewish hospital reflected the at times strenuous relations between parts of the Dutch Jewish colony and the Eastern European Jewish leadership at the helm of the Jewish institutions in Antwerp.[80] While Dutch Jews, such as Ruth Sarphati, had been among of the founding members of the *Centrale*, among many Dutch Jews the perception that the Centrale was an Eastern European-dominated Jewish institution, insufficiently attuned to specific Dutch needs, lived strongly and from time to time rumours of supposed 'unfair treatment' aroused indignation and heated tempers.[81] Despite the *Centrale*'s attempts to combat such rumours and popularize its work among the Dutch Jewish colony, at times with the active help of the NIG, the majority of the Dutch Jews remained unaffiliated to the *Centrale*, and Dutch Jews were underrepresented in its committees.[82] One Dutch observer, for instance, stated that among the 1200 members of the Centrale in 1924, only 102 Dutch Jews could be found.[83]

The Dutch Jewish initiative to go at it alone in establishing a Jewish hospital therefore represented the frustrations of many Dutch Jews and can most likely also be regarded as a vanity project meant to showcase the importance and prowess of the Dutch Jewish colony. Despite negotiations in later years to unite both initiatives, thereby maximising the available capital estimated in the millions to realize the project, these eventually failed to deliver as NIZA and the *Centrale* were unable to overcome their differences.[84]

institutions, see: Frey, "Een Joodse solidariteitsbeweging te Antwerpen", Katz, *75 jaar Centrale: Armoede en uitsluiting*.; see also: Stamberger, "Bridging the Divide: Philanthropy".

80 Most of the Centrale's leadership consisted of Jews from an Eastern European background. The majority had arrived in Belgium prior to the First World War, were well-integrated and came from a higher socio-economic background.

81 "De Hollandsche Joden en de Centrale", *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, March 22, 1924, 2.; It is also important to recognize that distrust and criticism towards the Centrale was not only confined to parts of the 'Dutch Jewish colony'. Also among (more recently-arrived) Eastern European Jewish immigrants, especially on the Left and in progressive circles, did the Centrale receive criticism such as the assertion that it was a 'class organization' or 'bourgeois institution', foreign from the Yiddish immigrant Jewish world. see: Stamberger, "Bridging the Divide: Philanthropy".

82 "Chronique Locale – Stadsnieuws", *La Centrale*, April 4, 1924, 2.; "Algemeene Vergadering van de Centrale voor Joodsche Weldadigheid op Zaterdag 22 February 1930", *La Centrale*, March 7,1930, 5.

83 "Oproep aan de Nederlandsche Israëlieten te Antwerpen", *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, February 29, 1924, 6.

84 "Der impozanter miting far'n yudishen beys hakholim", *Di yidishe prese*, June 15, 1928, 7.; "Geen Samenwerking tussen Beth-Hacholim Centrale en N.I.Z.A. mogelijk", *NIZA, Officieel Orgaan der Nederlandsche Ziekeninrichting*, June, 1929, 1-2.; "De puntjes op de i's", *NIZA, Officieel Orgaan der Nederlandsche Ziekeninrichting*, July, 1929, 1-5.

By the late 1920s two rival initiatives thus began the construction of a Jewish hospital in the city. One was led by NIZA which in *Oude God*, a rural suburb of Antwerp, bought a large plot and started the construction of the first floor of a modern hospital building.[85] The other was set up by the *Centrale* which purchased a large villa in *Deurne* (another rural suburb) and planned to renovate it into a new modern medical institution.[86] Both projects ultimately failed to materialize. The project of a Jewish hospital became one of the many victims of the Great Depression. The *Centrale* acquired a significant debt and its grand project was reduced to more modest proportions.[87] NIZA and the Dutch Jewish community were left with a huge financial debt which almost reached a million Belgian Francs and filed for bankruptcy. The plot and the incomplete building in *Oude God* were sold to pay off a part of this debt and the Dutch Jewish colony of Antwerp was faced with an existential crisis.[88] By early 1930 the NIG struggled to pay the rent to keep the doors of its synagogue open and desperately looked for a way out of its predicament.[89]

The solution was found at the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen*. Much had changed in the oldest official Jewish religious community since a majority of its Dutch members had seceded in 1905. In the years leading up to the First World War the influx of Eastern European Jews had given the community a stricter orthodox character. Even prior to the war it had opened new houses of prayer in the Jewish neighbourhood around the Central Station, and in 1927 it inaugurated a new (additional) synagogue (which served the affiliate community *Shomre Hadass*) at the corner of the *Van Den Nestlei* and the *Oostenstraat*.[90] In the late 1920s, following the increased economic and political pressures on the Jewish population and active lobbying of progressive members in Jewish society, the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen* embarked on a program to unify and consolidate the Jewish community around itself. Envisioning a grand *Einheitsgemeinde*,

85 For pictures of the building, see: "Een historische dag", *NIZA, Officieel Orgaan der Nederlandsche Ziekeninrichting*, December, 1929, 1-4.

86 "De Joodsche ziekenverpleging", *La Centrale*, January 17, 1930, 3.; For a sketch of the planned façade of the Centrale's building, see: *La Centrale*, September 6, 1929, 10-11.

87 Bikur Cholim's small polyclinique, which it had operated since the 1920s, was relocated from its offices at the *Lange Leemstraat* (seat of the Centrale) to 'Villa Jeanne' in Deurne in 1935.; Frey, "Een Joodse solidariteitsbeweging", 25.

88 "N.I.Z.A.", *NIW*, February 21, 1930, 16.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, October 17, 1930, 3.

89 "De Ned. Isr. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *NIW*, March 21, 1930, 12.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, July 11, 1930, 11-12.; "Antwerpen", *NIW*, December 5, 1930, 12.; "Eyn yudish shpital", *Di yidishe prese*, February 21, 1930, 2.

90 "La Communauté", *Hatikwah, organe périodique de la Fédération des Sionistes de Belgique*, March 18, 1927, 29.; See also : Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Antwerpen*, 109-110.

the community resolved not only to concern itself with religious matters but also take on responsibilities in the cultural and socio-economic realms.[91] In order to do so, it openly reached out to other religious communities (and non-religious organizations) to join its network.

For the NIG, deep in financial straits, this provided a welcome opportunity. By aligning itself with the *Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen*, it would be able to make use of its large institutional network and its substantial financial resources.[92] The fact that in *Machsike Hadass* a bitter internal dispute between Agudists and Zionists was reaching its fevered pitch and the community was not able to financially aid the Dutch Jews, most likely quickened the resolve of the Dutch community to switch allegiance and join the former's long-standing rival.[93] During the NIG's general assembly in February 1931 a resolution to join the *Israëlietische Gemeenschap van Antwerpen* was passed by a large majority.[94] In the beginning of March a festive religious service was held at the new oratory of the Dutch community at the *Pelikaanstraat* and the *Nederlandsche Israëlietische Gemeente* officially ceased to exist as an independent organization. Now a member of the *Israëlietische Gemeenschap van Antwerpen,* the Dutch oratory however retained a far-reaching degree of autonomy in defining its religious identity.[95] A few months later the small Dutch Sephardic community *Abodath Hakodesj* also decided to join the *Israëlietische Gemeenschap van Antwerpen*.[96]

The changing institutional affiliation of the NIG clearly shows where the priorities of the Dutch Jewish religious community lay: it wanted to ensure its autonomy and religious character. Around the religious community — which once again must be stressed, only represented a minority of the Dutch Jewish population in Antwerp — other Dutch Jewish institutions were

91 For the background and development of this project, see: Stamberger, "Jewish Migration and the Making of a Belgian Jewry", 421-431.

92 The Israëlietische Gemeente van Antwerpen had more members, and more members from an affluent background (diamond merchants). The fact that it was recognized by the government meant that some of its financial burdens (for instance the wages of the rabbi) were carried by the state.

93 For the struggles in *Machsike Hadass*, see: Stamberger, "Jewish Migration and the Making of a Belgian Jewry", 333-352.

94 "Antwerpen", *NIW*, February 27, 1931, 14.; Next to the Dutch Jewish oratory, new oratories also joined (or were created around) the Israëlietische gemeente in the 1930s such as: the Hungarian (chassidic) Beth Yitschok, Ahavat Shalom, and Beth Midrash Moriah.

95 "De Ned. Isr. Gemeente te Antwerpen", *NIW*, March 13, 1931, 18.; *NIW*, March 27, 1931, 2, 5.; "Extra godsdienstoefening ter gelegenheid van de aansluiting der Nederl. Israel. Gem. bij de Hoofdgemeente – Antwerpen", *NIW*, April 10, 1931, 3.; "Der spetsiyeler gotsdinst lekoved dem onshlus fun der holandisher gemeynde in der yudisher gemeynde", *Di yidishe prese*, March 20, 1931, 8.

96 "Port. Isr. Gem. Abodath Hakodesch", *NIW*, June 5, 1931, 11.

created. Next to NIZA, a Dutch Jewish Orthodox (but politically neutral) youth association was created in 1924 (and once again re-established in 1928) under the name *Machanei Jisroeil*.[97] Despite its shaky beginnings it soon flourished and by 1930 counted 105 members and organized trips, cultural and religious activities.[98] The strong ties between the NIG and the *Israëlietische begrafenisvereeniging 'Antwerpen'* were maintained during the interwar period; the latter retained its Dutch Jewish leadership while becoming one of the largest associations in Antwerp's Jewish life with over 2000 members from all the different segments of its Jewish population.[99] Dutch Jewish periodicals such as *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België* (1923-1924), *De Nieuwe Luchter* (1926-1929), *NIZA* (1928-1929), or *Machanei Jisroeil* (1929-1930) kept the Dutch Jewish public informed about the developments in the Dutch Jewish colony of Antwerp and kept them abreast of the developments in Jewish life across the northern border. During the interwar period, Dutch Jewish institutions thus became increasingly integrated into Eastern European Jewish-dominated orthodox world, yet carefully guarded their independence and specific Dutch character.

A closer examination of the history of the Dutch Jewish colony in Antwerp in the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates that Jewish life in the city, and in Belgium more generally, was far richer and more diverse than presented by the Eastern European Jewish perspective from which it often has been examined. The attention to diversity within minority groups allows us to better understand the internal complexity, heterogeneity, and dynamics within minorities. The confrontation of Dutch Jews with the large-scale arrival of Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their diminishing position in the Jewish population had given rise to specific Dutch Jewish institutions which reflected their Dutch Jewish culture. In the 1930s, these institutions and 'Dutch Jewish colony' became firmly imbedded within the existing (Eastern European) Jewish institutions of the city. The German invasion in May 1940 and the subsequent occupation of Belgium which witnessed the introduction of anti-Jewish measures and ultimately the attempted destruction of Belgium's Jewish community heralded a new painful chapter. Once again, the Dutch Jews in the city would struggle to respond to these new circumstances.

97 "Machanei Jisroeil", *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, May 10, 1914, 2.; "Een nieuwe Jeugdvereeniging", *De Nieuwe Luchter*, March, 1928, 3.

98 "Jaarverslag over het vereenigingsleven 1928-1929", *Machanei Jisroeil*, February, 1930, 3.

99 "Eenige beschouwingen naar aanleiding van de algemene vergaderingen der Israëlietische Begrafenisvereeniging 'Antwerpen'", *Ons Orgaan, Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten in België*, November 10, 1923, 1.

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