

Acculturation and Particularism in the Modern City:  
Synagogue Building and Jewish Identity in Northern Europe

by

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To David Jonathan Snyder  
*“With chutzpah and gusto. . .”*

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# Chapter I

## Introduction



Fig. 1: Postcard of the Oranienburgerstraße Synagogue in Berlin

When the New West End synagogue in London was inaugurated in the spring of 1879, members of the congregation as well as guests invited for the day's festivities received a small token of remembrance. "Each visitor," reported the *Jewish Chronicle*, "was presented with a cabinet-sized photograph of the interior," which could be framed at home or sent to curious friends or relatives living elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The photograph, taken by Lionel L. Alexander at the request of the building committee, depicted an imposing prayer room marked by galleries on the northern and southern walls, tall pillars and pointed arches, and a dignified ark crowned by a bulbous dome and illuminated by a rose window placed in the eastern wall. "All the surroundings here," boasted the editorial, "betoken freedom, refinement, and luxury," making the New West End Synagogue "emphatically a place of worship for the well-to-do." Indeed, presenting every guest (including reporters) with a photograph was itself a sign of communal affluence, and its subsequent display in living rooms, local newspapers, and architectural journals assured that these new socio-economic realities were visible in the private as well as in the public arena.

A similar event occurred in Berlin, where the inauguration of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue in 1866 led to the production of postcards proudly displaying the Jewish community's new addition. The building, designed by Eduard Knoblauch in a Moorish-inspired style, became a new landmark in the Prussian capital. Its reproduction in the 1870s and 1880s, prompted by the growing trend of sending greetings to friends

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<sup>1</sup> "The Consecration of the New West End Synagogue," *The Jewish Chronicle*, no. 523 (April 4, 1879): 4. Subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from this editorial. The production of commemorative objects was not a new phenomenon – communities sometimes made medals or engraved beakers to celebrate the inauguration of a new synagogue. These objects, however, circulated primarily in the private sphere, whereas photographs became part of the public domain and reached a much wider Jewish and non-Jewish audience. *The Builder* and *The Illustrated London News*, for instance, contained illustrations of new synagogues and of religious rituals taking place inside of the building.

and family by means of picture postcards, advertised the synagogue as a public symbol of Berlin Jewish prosperity and *embourgeoisement*.

These reproductions expose more than merely the advancement of modern technology or the emergence of a social trend. A close examination of the New West End photograph or the Oranienburgerstraße postcard, for one, illustrates that European synagogue architecture had entered a new era. With the exception of the Sephardic and Ashkenazic synagogues of Golden Age Amsterdam, monumentality and conspicuousness had not been typical of Jewish houses of worship. On the contrary, until the second half of the nineteenth century most synagogues in Europe were modest, unassuming buildings. The construction of a magnificent building in the center of Berlin, the golden dome of which was visible from afar, clearly indicates that something had changed for urban Jews in Europe over the course of the century. Secondly, the distribution of photographs and postcards featuring grand religious edifices suggests that the synagogue had taken on a new public role in the lives of these Jews. Previously confined to the private domain, the building itself became central to mediating Jewishness in a modern society, announcing the cultural sophistication, bourgeois affluence, and religious respectability of the Jewish community.

While the first argument is well-known – the change to monumental synagogue architecture as a reflection of the changing socio-economic and legal status of urban Jews is a well-documented theme in the literature on nineteenth century European Jewry – the second deserves more attention. Synagogues had been part of the urban landscape since antiquity, but it is only in the modern period that the buildings themselves became intimately tied to the public face of Judaism and to Jewish self-identification. Before this

time “being Jewish” was not defined by attendance at a synagogue – religious services were held wherever a *minyan*<sup>2</sup> formed, either in a designated part of a private house or in a converted room of a store, and consequently Jewish men worshipped in a variety of places. For women, too, the synagogue building played a subordinate role in their daily lives. While women attended synagogue, they generally did so less frequently than their husbands as Jewish law did not require their presence, but instead encouraged them to observe Shabbat in the domestic sphere, attending to their familial responsibilities. Much of what it meant to be a Jew in early modern Europe, in other words, derived from immersion in a community that was defined by Jewish laws, rituals, folklore, and celebrations. It was, as Steven Lowenstein contends, “an unreflective ‘traditional Judaism,’ . . . a way of life that one followed without much questioning.”<sup>3</sup> Leo Baeck, the distinguished German rabbi and scholar, referred to this as *Milieufrömmigkeit*.<sup>4</sup> Identity and self-representation, especially in the architectural realm, were not a topic of concern. The synagogue building itself, then, played only a marginal role in Jewish life.

The subordination of the actual structure to the activities taking place inside of it was encouraged by the restrictions imposed on synagogue building in the middle-ages and the early modern period. The local state authorities who tolerated a Jewish presence in their towns prohibited Jews from constructing conspicuous buildings as they did not want synagogues to compete with Christian churches. The height of the former, for instance, was not to exceed that of the local church, which explains why the main floor of some synagogues was built below ground level. Jews could only build houses of worship

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<sup>2</sup> A *minyan* refers to the quorum of ten males required for public worship.

<sup>3</sup> Steven M. Lowenstein, “The Beginning of Integration, 1780-1870,” in Marion A. Kaplan’s *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 144.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Baeck is quoted in Michael A. Meyer’s “The Thought of Leo Baeck: A Religious Philosophy for a Time of Adversity,” *Modern Judaism* 19: 2 (1999): 107-117.

in peripheral sections of town, typically bordering the city walls, the very location of which reinforced their exceptional position within the community. Restrictions were also imposed on the number of windows, on the inclusion of a clock tower or bells, all intended to minimize the visibility and audibility of the Jewish population. By and large, Jews did not balk at these limitations for not only did they lack the leverage to challenge them, but they also lacked the means to erect a large and elaborate house of worship, even if they had had permission to do so. Moreover, Jews were reluctant to invest in a building that was highly vulnerable – not merely because of sporadic outbursts of antisemitic violence, but also because of the real possibility that the land on which the synagogue stood might be sold by the Christian landowner and the building lost. Synagogues thus tended to be small and inconspicuous, and they did not have an overt mediating function vis-à-vis Christians.

Religious “dissent” by Jewish minorities, in other words, was generally tolerated in early modern Europe as long as it was confined to the private sphere. This explains, according to Benjamin Kaplan, why dissenting churches and synagogues located in private homes, or in small buildings concealed from public view, were considered acceptable. Christian locals knew these prayer houses existed, but as long as they remained “invisible” they could exist in relative peace. “By containing religious dissent within spaces demarcated as private,” maintains Kaplan, “clandestine churches and synagogues preserved the monopoly of a community’s official church in the public sphere. By maintaining a semblance of religious unity, they neutralized the threat posed by dissent to the identity and thus to the very integrity of communities.”<sup>5</sup> As long as

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<sup>5</sup> While Kaplan does not explain the obvious exception of the highly visible Spanish-Portuguese and German-Jewish synagogues of seventeenth-century Amsterdam, which became popular tourist attractions,

Jews, Catholics, Quakers, and other religious minorities practiced their faith behind closed doors, the religious status-quo could be upheld.

This equilibrium changed during the age of emancipation, when synagogues began to transcend this boundary and assumed a new presence in the public domain. Not only was the structure itself increasingly used by Jews to communicate their cultural sophistication and social respectability visually; the ritual of going to the synagogue also became a means through which Jewish men and women proclaimed their “Jewishness.” In cities all over Europe – from London to Budapest, from Stockholm to Turin – Jewish communities initiated impressive building projects that rendered synagogues highly visible components of the urban landscape, overtly announcing their presence through size, architectural distinctiveness, location, religious symbols and rituals. Design competitions, for instance, announced in popular building journals, and the formation of boards to review the submissions rendered their construction a municipal affair. Particularly from the 1860s onward, Moorish-style structures, bold in color and elaborate in design, began to adorn Europe’s cities, arresting the gaze of passersby and proudly demanding recognition. These “urban exclamation marks,”<sup>6</sup> as Primo Levi referred to them, reflected a conscious decision on the part of Jews to advertise their adherence to their faith at a time when doing so had become optional. Monumental synagogues thus became visual expressions of how Jews saw themselves and how they wanted to be seen

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his overall argument is convincing. See Benjamin J. Kaplan, “Fictions of Privacy: House Chapels and the Spatial Accommodation of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe,” *American Historical Review* 107: 4 (October 2002), 1031-1064.

<sup>6</sup> Primo Levi, “Prefazione,” in *Ebrei a Torino. Ricerche per il centenario della sinagoga 1884-1984* (Turin, 1984). Ivan Davidson Kalmar informs us that Levi was referring to the “mole Antoniano” in Turin. See Kalmar, “Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7: 3 (Spring/Summer 2001): 68-100, n. 86.



by their contemporaries – as confident bourgeois citizens whose faith in progress and sense of security permitted the public celebration of Judaism.

Inaugurations of new synagogues, as a result, became highly publicized events. When the new synagogue in Brussels, located in the Rue de la Régence between the Conservatorium and the future Palace of Justice, was consecrated in the fall of 1879, “there was a great theatrical display.”<sup>7</sup> Representatives of the press and local Brussels notables received invitations to attend the ceremony. The neighboring Conservatorium, reported London’s *Jewish Chronicle*, “lent a chorus of singers under the direction of M. Cornelis to assist at the service,” and a certain Mademoiselle Bernardi from the Theatre de la Monnaie undertook the solo parts. Even the Catholic clergy, noted the London newspaper, had been invited to participate in the ceremony by lending an organist and singers “to add to the *éclat* of the proceedings,” a request that was apparently refused. There was indeed, according to the *Jewish Chronicle*, “a wide difference between worshipping in hidden places as we were compelled to do in former times, and the showy publicity to which we have drawn attention.” That this transformation had not gone unnoticed by the Christian press is attested by the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, which, in its account on the inauguration, criticized the Jews for their “impropriety in seeking publicity for their religious services.” The entry of Judaism into the public domain did not automatically mean a warm welcome by those already occupying it.

The emerging public face of Judaism by means of constructing architecturally distinctive synagogues went hand in hand with new conceptions about the very nature and purpose of the buildings in the lives of modern Jews. Michael Meyer elaborated on

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<sup>7</sup> “Consecration of the New Synagogue at Brussels,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, no. 497 (October 4, 1879). The additional quotations in this paragraph, including that from *Le Figaro*, are from this editorial.

this reconceptualization in the case of nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>8</sup> Before emancipation, Meyer argues, synagogues were considered mere substitutes for the ancient Temple of Jerusalem. While they contained a measure of sacredness, mostly represented by the ark holding the Torah scrolls, Jewish communal prayer was primarily directed at the restoration of *the* sanctuary in the land of Israel and Diaspora synagogues merely served as instruments in the historic movement toward redemption. Indeed, the building itself “possessed no inherent holiness but only the derivative sanctity that attached to it because the community gathered there to sanctify God and to petition for the re-establishment of the ancient glory.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the synagogue, as Dominique Jarrassé phrased it, “was but a function.”<sup>10</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, newly erected synagogues acquired a spatial sanctity that they had previously lacked. As political emancipation altered the legal status of Jews, and as growing acculturation to the prevailing societal norms rendered Germany the new Zion, the synagogue became a *Heiligtum*, a holy place, in its own right.<sup>11</sup> “Jerusalem,” after all, “is

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<sup>8</sup> Michael A. Meyer, “How Awesome is this Place! The Reconceptualisation of the Synagogue in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” in *Judaism within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion*, ed. by Michael A. Meyer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001): 223-238.

<sup>9</sup> Meyer, 225.

<sup>10</sup> Dominique Jarrassé, *Synagogues: Architecture and Jewish Identity* (Paris: Vilo International, 2001): 13.

<sup>11</sup> Meyer argues that the reconceptualization of the synagogue was reflected in the language use of German Jewry. It was not common to describe the synagogue as a *Heiligtum* or *Gotteshaus* before the nineteenth century, terms that were typically reserved for Christian churches. During the age of emancipation, however, using “non-Jewish” terms to describe synagogues became increasingly common, particularly in dedication sermons. This shift in usage, explains Meyer, was related to the Jews’ political ambitions. Using a neutral term such as *Gotteshaus* or *Heiligtum* to refer to the synagogue made the statement that Jewish and Christian houses of worship were not fundamentally different – both were dedicated to one God and places of refuge from the secular world – and therefore that Jews and Christians were not fundamentally different. Furthermore, the rendition of the synagogue as a “holy place” suggests that the traditionally temporal distinction between holy and profane – that of the Sabbath and the rest of the week – had become a spatial one, namely that of the synagogue and the surrounding world. By reintroducing spatial sanctity, writes Meyer, “the preachers were not simply following the cultural code of contemporary Christianity, they were returning to the paradigm of ancient Judaism and, consciously or not, describing their new houses of worship more on the model of the Temple than on that of Diaspora houses of prayer.” Making the synagogue a sacred place was thus a sign of and an instrument to acculturation and political emancipation.

not merely in Jerusalem; Jerusalem is wherever a devoted community lives, wherever it has raised a sanctuary to worship the divine and study the law.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition to attaining sanctity, the synagogue became a place of edification (an *Erbauungsort*), in which the display of bourgeois etiquette would “educate” and “edify” the worshipper. Particularly in Germany, where Jews sought above all to integrate into the *Bildungsbürgertum* to prove they were worthy of political equality, did synagogues become a means to expose Jewish “regeneration.” Organs, mixed seating, edifying sermons in the native tongue, and wedding ceremonies found their way into houses of worship, profoundly altering the interior design of the building.<sup>13</sup> Synagogues, one can argue, simultaneously adopted a sacred and a secular bourgeois function – a telling reflection, as we shall see, of the socio-economic, political, and ideological ambitions of urban Jewish communities in nineteenth-century Europe.

In what follows I will explore the emergence of purpose-built synagogues, but I will do so within a comparative framework. In particular, I will examine the debates surrounding building projects in Amsterdam, London, and Berlin in the second half of the nineteenth century. These north European capitals stood in relatively close proximity of each other and witnessed similar trends that paved the way for a new synagogue architecture, such as a dramatic growth in population and the rise of a Jewish middle class. Yet the Jews who lived there attached very different meanings to synagogues due

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<sup>12</sup> The French rabbi Zadoc Kahn said these words in an 1872 sermon entitled “Le Temple”: “Le temple, il est vrai, sera reconstruit une seconde fois sur le mont Moria. Mais déjà le judaïsme a reconnu que ses destinées ne sont pas liées à l’existence de ce monument sacré. Jérusalem n’est plus seulement dans Jérusalem; Jérusalem est partout où vit une communauté de fidèles, partout où l’on a élevé un sanctuaire pour adorer le Très-Haut et étudier sa Loi.” Kahn is quoted in Dominique Jarrassé’s *L’Age d’Or des Synagogues* (Paris: Herscher, 1991), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Wedding ceremonies were traditionally held in courtyards or in the countryside, but in the nineteenth century it became increasingly fashionable to get married in the synagogue. Communal leaders, contends Jarrassé, initially opposed this new trend, but obliged once they recognized the advantages: it maintained order in the community and raised communal funds. See Jarrassé, 23.

to distinctive local conditions. Demographic patterns, the price of land, the legal status of Jews, the strength of religious Reform, the level of acculturation, and the financial resources of the congregation all influenced the architectural outcome but, more importantly, they also determined how the building in question was used and understood in its new public function. The New West End building, as we shall see, meant something quite different to London Jewry than the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue did to Berlin Jews, precisely because the conditions in which the latter erected their synagogue differed significantly from those of London – the lack of full civil rights is but an obvious example. By comparing how Jews talked about, built, and used monumental synagogues in their local context, we can gain a more nuanced view not only of synagogue building in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but also of the urban Jewish experience in northern Europe.

### **Methodology and Historiography**

One strategy to better define the relationship between monumental synagogue architecture and Jewish identity is the incorporation of space and place as a methodological dimension. Since the ground-breaking publications of Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and David Harvey on the production of space in the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a growing scholarly interest in space and place as legitimate objects of analysis.<sup>14</sup> Rather than regarding space and location as neutral categories innocent of

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<sup>14</sup> See, among others, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), originally published as *La Production de l'Espace* in 1974; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), originally published as *L'invention du quotidien. Vol. 1, Arts de faire* in 1974; Edward W. Soja, *The Political Organization of Space* (Washington: Association of American Geographers, Commission on College Geography, 1971); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). These works inspired the so-called “spatial turn” in the field of cultural studies,

political or ideological manipulation – “simply inherited from nature,” as Lefebvre phrased it – they are now increasingly accepted as social products actively engaged in the construction of cultural identities. Indeed, some scholars have argued that the more conventional categories of historical analysis such as class, race, ethnicity, and gender can no longer be applied effectively without a careful consideration of the built environment and of more abstract notions of public and private, territorial boundaries and transgression. Space and place, in other words, determine “how human interaction occurs, who interacts with whom, and the content of that interaction, [making them] bearers of meaning in their own right.”<sup>15</sup> This greater sensitivity to spatiality and locality as active forces shaping human behavior has allowed for a better understanding of how social relations are constructed. It has also illuminated the sometimes highly political and ideological agenda of those involved in the production of space and place. Urban ghettos, gated communities, and middle-class suburbs, for instance, show quite clearly the intent to segregate one ethnic, religious, or economic group from another, significantly influencing people’s behavior, the ways in which they identify themselves, and how they are perceived in society at large.

The buildings that adorn our urban landscapes participate in these processes. They are not lifeless structures that silently witness the passing of the ages, merely offering shelter for human activities until they are destroyed or added to a preservation list. On the contrary, they actively shape everyday experiences. Aside from their practical use in the

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which emphasized the importance of the concept of ‘space’ as an analytical category as opposed to that of ‘time.’ Geographical (spatial), rather than historical (temporal), forces became the means to better understand social and cultural processes. “The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history,” wrote Foucault in 1986, “the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space.”

<sup>15</sup> Mike Parker Pearson and Colin Richards, “Ordering the World: Perceptions of Architecture, Space and Time,” in Pearson and Richards (eds.), *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-33.

organization of our lives – by providing accommodations for living, work, education, religious services, and cultural activities – buildings play a crucial role in defining who we are, or aspire to be, as people. They communicate to the public cultural preferences and political ambitions, religious heritage, successes and failures. Moreover, people’s use (or neglect) of buildings, their attempts to embellish (or vandalize) them, and the desire to reproduce them reveals they are not merely inert objects of reflection, but mediums through which cultural practices are established and reproduced. Buildings, in other words, matter. They have stories to tell – stories about the need for their existence, about the people who use them, and about the events taking place within or around them.

How buildings are seen, treated, and remembered is subject to cultural change; they have no intrinsic, stable meaning. Brian Ladd showed this quite convincingly in his examination of Berlin, in which he linked the city’s urban landscape with German national identity. To Ladd, buildings and monuments are “the visible remnants of the past,” important not because of their aesthetic value, but because “they are the symbols and repositories of memory.”<sup>16</sup> Interpretations of and responses to such structures as the Brandenburg Gate, Hitler’s bunker, and the Reichstag altered as Germany was transformed from a totalitarian state, to a divided nation, to a reunited capitalist democracy, revealing much about the city’s history and Germany’s collective identity. It was not the physical form of the buildings themselves, in other words, but the dynamic interaction with human participants within a particular historical setting – what critical theorist Lindsay Jones called the “human experience of architecture” – that produced meaning and that illuminates the inherently fluid, situational, and transient nature of this

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 4.

meaning as historical contexts continually change.<sup>17</sup> The meaning of a building, then, is “not a condition or quality of the thing itself, [but] arises from situations . . . at some specific time in some specific place.”<sup>18</sup> Without contextualization, buildings remain silent.

Jones’ work on *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, in which he argues for the need to relate aesthetics with religious rituals and human experiences in order to produce interpretation, is particularly helpful to our case study. If architectural meaning arises in relation to circumstance, then we need a greater sensitivity to space and place in order to better understand the meaning of purpose-built synagogues and their new function in the public domain. This requires an examination of the triangular framework consisting of the building in question, the human actors who surrounded it, and the context in which their interaction occurred. How Jews talked about the synagogue – in newspapers, in building committee minutes, or even in picture postcards – and how Jews utilized the building are therefore central themes, as are the local conditions that give each of the three cities under scrutiny its own story.

Of course many works have already been written on the synagogues of Europe. Rachel Wischnitzer, Carol Herselle Krinsky, and Brian de Breffny, to name a few, have described in great detail the ancient synagogues of Rome and Greece, the synagogues of medieval Europe, and the modern temples of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison. Volume One: Monumental Occasions. Reflections on the Eventfulness of Religious Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, 41.

<sup>19</sup> See, among others, Rachel Wischnitzer’s *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964); Carol Herselle Krinsky’s *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1985); Brian de Breffny’s *The Synagogue* (London: Widenfeld and Nicolson, 1978); Marilyn Joyce Segal Chiat, *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982); Joseph Gutmann, *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins,*

These publications aim primarily at presenting a comprehensive study of synagogue architecture, and move effortlessly between the four corners of Europe and from Roman ruins to twentieth-century Modernism. European scholars have taken a somewhat narrower approach by limiting their observations to synagogues built within their own national borders. In Germany, Harold Hammer-Schenk's two-volume *Synagogen in Deutschland: Geschichte einer Baugattung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, has become a classic on German-Jewish religious architecture, although others, such as Hannelore Künzl, Hans-Peter Schwartz, Helmut Eschwege, and Renate Krüger have also added valuable contributions to the field.<sup>20</sup> Many of these German-language publications have been attempts to retrace a history that was largely lost during the *Kristallnacht* of November 9, 1938, during which hundreds of synagogues were set aflame by Nazi zealots. Künzl's work, for instance, followed the 1978 German exhibition on medieval Jewry (*Judentum im Mittelalter*) held in the city of Schloß Halbturn, Burgenland. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin's edited volume on *Synagogenarchitektur in Deutschland vom Barock zum 'Neuen Bauen'* was the result of an exhibition organized by the Technical University

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*Archeology, and Architecture* (New York: Ktav Publishers, 1974). For popular, non-scholarly accounts, see Azriel Eisenberg's *The Synagogue through the Ages* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1974); Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Story of the Synagogue: A Diaspora Museum Book* (Tel Aviv, 1986); Harold A. Meek, *The Synagogue* (London: Phaidon, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> See Harold Hammer-Schenk, *Synagogen in Deutschland. Geschichte einer Baugattung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert - 1780-1933* (Hamburg: Christians, 1981); Renate Krüger, *Die Kunst der Synagoge* (Leipzig, 1966); Hannelore Künzl, "Die Architektur der mittelalterlichen Synagogen und rituellen Bäder," in K. Schubert (ed.) *Judentum im Mittelalter* (Eisenstadt, 1978): 40-59; Künzl, *Islamische Stilelemente im Synagogenbau des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1984); Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die Architektur der Synagoge* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988); Helmut Eschwege, *Die Synagoge in der Deutschen Geschichte. Eine Dokumentation* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1980); Gerhard W. D. Mühlhngaus, *Der Synagogenbau des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts im aschkenasischen Raum* (Marburg: Universität Marburg, 1986); Aliza Cohen Mushlin et al., *Synagogenarchitektur in Deutschland vom Barock zum 'Neuen Bauen': Dokumentation zur Ausstellung* (Braunschweig: Fachgebiet Baugeschichte, 2000); Helen Rosenau, "The Architecture of the Synagogue in Neoclassicism and Historicism," in Clare Moore (ed.) *The Visual Dimension: Aspects of Jewish Art* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993): 83-103; Rosenau, "German Synagogues in the Early Period of Emancipation," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 8 (*LBIYB*, 1963): 214-225.



of Braunschweig and the Center for Jewish Art of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the summer of 2000. Schwarz's work appeared in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, whereas Hermann Simon's edited volume *Tuet auf die Pforten: Die Neue Synagoge 1866-1995* was published after the reconstruction of the Oranienburgerstraße façade and the opening of the museum in 1995. These works are mostly descriptive; they present in detail the interior and exterior appearance of German synagogues and relate the often challenging conditions in which they were constructed.

In France the authority on synagogue architecture is Dominique Jarrassé, whose articles explore the "Sefarad Imaginaire" among the Sephardim of France and the Iberian Peninsula. In his *Histoire des Synagogues Françaises*, Jarrassé explores French Jewry's attraction to both the Occident and the Orient, reflected in what he describes as the "sémitisation" of synagogue forms. In Holland Edward van Voolen and J. van Agt's *Synagogen in Nederland* (1988) is still considered the standard work on Dutch synagogues. While much has been written on the famous Spanish-Portuguese and German-Jewish synagogues of Amsterdam during the Golden Age, van Voolen and van Agt are virtually the only ones – together with Carolus Reijnders' examination of *hevra* synagogues – who have dealt with the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> That Dutch synagogue building was past its prime and did not witness construction plans on a scale similar to

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<sup>21</sup> Dominique Jarrassé, *L'âge d'or des synagogues* (Paris: Herscher, 1991); *Une histoire des synagogues françaises: entre Occident et Orient: essai* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1997); *Synagogues: Architecture and Jewish Identity* (Paris: Vilo International, 2001). See also Jarrassé, "l'Architecture des Synagogues au XIXe Siècle: Entre Francisation et 'Sémitisation,'" *Revue des Etudes Juives* 155 : 1-2 (1996): 319-326; "Sefarad Imaginaire: Le Style Hispano-Mauresque dans les Synagogues Françaises du XIXe Siècle," in Esther Benbassa (ed.) *Mémoires Juives d'Espagne et du Portugal* (Paris: Publisud, 1996): 261-269; "Un espace juif émancipé? L'implantation des synagogues dans la France du XIXe siècle," *Les Nouveaux Cahiers* 95 (1988-1989): 29-34. As far as the Dutch literature on synagogues is concerned, see among others J. J. F. W. van Agt and E. van Voolen, *Synagogen in Nederland* (Hilversum: Gooi & Sticht, 1988); J. J. F. W. van Agt, *Synagogen in Amsterdam* ('s-Gravenhage, 1974); Carolus Reijnders, "Op zoek naar oude chewre-sjoeltjes in Amsterdam," *Hakehilla* 33:1 (September, 1987): 27-32 through *Hakehilla* 34:1 (September, 1988): 12-16.

that elsewhere in Europe has certainly contributed to this lack of interest. Great Britain, on the other hand, has witnessed a number of important publications on Anglo-Jewish architecture, in particular by Sharman Kadish, Edward Jamilly, Peter Renton, and Clarence Epstein. These studies are first and foremost concerned with restoration, conservation, building policy, and the raising of public awareness about the serious state of deterioration of British synagogues.<sup>22</sup>

The majority of these architectural historians and concerned conservationists have, naturally, approached synagogues almost exclusively from an architectural perspective. They are primarily concerned with aesthetics and design, with the documentation, description, and categorization of synagogues into distinctive style periods. The result is generally a chronological overview neatly divided into artificially-created blocks, such as “The Middle Ages” or “The Renaissance,” that present particular aesthetic patterns and characteristic building plans, usually at the expense of a more nuanced approach to complex urban geographies. Due to the comprehensive nature of their work, local circumstances, *mentalités*, demographic patterns, and ideological forces tend to receive only marginal attention, despite the fact that these factors played a key role in the decision-making process – in choosing the architect, a particular style, the location and size of the building, the external display of Jewish symbols, and the interior floor-plan.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Sharman Kadish’s edited volume *Building Jerusalem: Jewish Architecture in Britain* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996); *Jewish Heritage in England: An Architectural Guide* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2006); “Squandered Heritage: Jewish Buildings in Britain,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 10 (no. 1-2, 1991): 147-65; Edward Jamilly, “An Introduction to Victorian Synagogues,” *Victorian Society Annual* (1991): 22-35; “Synagogue Bodies: Building Policy and Conservative Issues,” in Kadish’s *Building Jerusalem* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996): 84-100; Paul Lindsay, *The Synagogues of London* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 1993); Peter Renton, *The Lost Synagogues of London* (London: Tymsder Publishings, 2000).

An additional complication in the existing literature concerns periodization. The majority of authors who deal with synagogue architecture have not given the second half of the nineteenth century the attention it deserves. They view this period as one of eclectic disorder, in which no architectural style was dominant. Gothic revivalists competed with neo-Classical traditionalists, while eclectics advocated new syntheses of Romanesque, Renaissance, Baroque, and Eastern elements. This aesthetic diversity was the outcome of a number of new developments. The expansion and mechanization of the building industry and the availability of new materials produced a building frenzy in European cities. The demand for architects and professional builders was high, and control over their designs – especially in the speculative housing market – increasingly complicated. Moreover, newly-founded applied-arts schools and technical institutes, as well as popular building journals, informed architects about archeological discoveries and about different aesthetic idioms. As urbanization and industrialization led to the explosive growth of European cities and to the rise of a commercial building market, and as the state ceased to be the only patron stipulating a preferred style, architects were presented with a plethora of possibilities. A period of great diversity followed, one in which architects competed to construct new standards for an architectural culture in the midst of profound economic and socio-political change.

As a result of this fragmentation, many authors have labeled late-nineteenth century synagogues, the designs of which were subject to Europe’s multilingual aesthetic climate, either too variegated to fit into any clear category or too bland to reflect the complexities of the time. They usually pass over this “messy” period altogether. This is especially true for England. The synagogues built between 1870 and 1900 have received

only cursory attention. Helen Rosenau, for instance, did not include any Anglo-Jewish synagogues in her discussion of their architectural development, stating that “the richness of the forms of the buildings are in inverse ratio to their artistic merit.” Wischnitzer and De Breeffny point only to the new Hambro synagogue (1899) and the Stoke Newington synagogue (1903) in their analyses. The former found the Stoke Newington “rather dull and uniform in appearance [but] . . . an efficient building” while the latter concluded that it was a “successful building from a practical standpoint [but] an aesthetic failure, indicative of the stylistic disintegration only too common at the time in Europe.”<sup>23</sup> Their primary concern with aesthetics and design rendered London synagogues uninteresting. There is a *reason*, however, why the Stoke Newington and other synagogues in London were “dull,” which is part of the overall story of Anglo-Jewish architecture. This will be the topic of chapter four.

Most architectural historians have thus been rather unimpressed with this period as a significant architectural era. The bad image of eclecticism lies, according to the Dutch art historian Auke van der Woud, primarily in its indifference to the notion of style. “In twentieth-century art history, with its markedly high regard for ‘style,’ the term ‘eclecticism’ has often been used pejoratively, [pointing to] a lack of direction, artistic impotence, the low point of the nineteenth century’s ‘carnival of styles.’”<sup>24</sup> Contemporary eclectics might have considered their work an expression of individual freedom rather than “oppressive artistic orthodoxy,”<sup>25</sup> but this was not a philosophy that

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<sup>23</sup> Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue*, 221; De Breeffny, *The Synagogue*, 180; Helen Rosenau is quoted in Judy Glasman’s thesis “London Synagogues and the Jewish Community, c. 1870-1900” (London: Bartlett School of Architecture, London University, 1982), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Auke van der Woud, *The Art of Building: From Classicism to Modernity. The Dutch Architectural Debate 1840-1990* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), x.

<sup>25</sup> Van de Woud, 35.

twentieth-century art historians – including those working on synagogues – necessarily shared. As a result, they have either condensed their discussion of the “bewildering variety” of synagogues built in this period to a short discussion of contemporary aesthetic fragmentation, or they have focused exclusively on the phenomenon of Moorish-inspired buildings in relation to the German Reform movement. De Breffny, for instance, who described the post-1830 period as “an alarming social and aesthetic situation in architecture” that led to “an overuse of styles,”<sup>26</sup> was unsure how to deal with such diversity and consequently shifted his attention to German Reform and the Oriental influence in central Europe, leaving much of the post-1860 period unexplored. Uri Kaploun, too, concluded that “nineteenth century synagogue architecture was of a rather low general standard,” largely due to the dominance of Christian architects: “There were as yet few Jewish architects, so that the architectural requirements of Jewish religious law were often interpreted somewhat insensitively by others. Since the nineteenth century lacked any single coherent architectural style of its own, the result could often be stylistic uncertainty, overloaded ornament unrelated to structure, and synagogues in [a variety of] styles, or sometimes an unconvincing mixture of several of these.”<sup>27</sup> He then moves on to the twentieth century. That many Jewish communities were actually quite pleased with an eclectic design, and that the later nineteenth century was a remarkable era exactly because of its complexities, has not registered with scholars.

A third characteristic of the existing work on Europe’s synagogues is their almost exclusive focus on prestigious, well-known buildings, leaving many others in the shadows – it is simply an impossible task to include each and every structure in a

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<sup>26</sup> De Breffny, 174-175.

<sup>27</sup> Uri Kaploun, ed. *The Synagogue* (Jerusalem, 1973), 95.

comprehensive survey. Smaller synagogues especially, or ones that did not reflect the dominant aesthetic trends, have oftentimes been dismissed as of little architectural significance. This is particularly true for *hevrot*, i.e., small autonomous synagogues that generally functioned independently from the main Jewish community, which proliferated in Amsterdam. Their style might not have stirred the city's architectural scene – the majority was modest in size and appearance – but their emergence at a time when Jews in other European capitals initiated large-scale building programs renders them an important component to the overall story. Judy Glasman, who has written on Victorian synagogues in London, argued persuasively that they “add a new dimension to our knowledge of synagogue building [and should] be seen as part of the total synagogue provision at the time.” Architectural historians, in other words, have told an important part of the story, but it is an incomplete story nonetheless.

There have been a few attempts to challenge these scholarly trends. The growing interest in multidisciplinary, visible across the academic landscape, has produced some illuminating work in the field of synagogue architecture. Scott Lerner, for instance, who has written primarily on the “architecture of Emancipation” in nineteenth-century Italy, applies the postmodern language of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco in his description of synagogues. To him, the monumental temples in Florence, Rome, and Turin served as “story-telling signifiers. . . [that] emerged as their own narrative presence, reassuming and rewriting the public story of Jewish identity in predominantly Christian countries.”<sup>28</sup> Their bold designs and public presence dismantled the Christian narrative of Jewish suffering in the Diaspora and announced instead the “reconstruction” of the Temple of Jerusalem in their Italian homeland. These Jews, suggests Lerner, considered themselves

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<sup>28</sup> L. Scott Lerner, “The Narrating Architecture of Emancipation,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6: 3 (2000): 1-30.

as much Italian as Jewish. Ivan Davidson Kalmar, too, in his examination of Moorish-style synagogues as popular expressions of Jews' "oriental self-identity,"<sup>29</sup> creates links between historical and architectural studies. The Moorish style, writes Kalmar, was purposefully chosen as its "foreignness" fit perfectly with European society's fascination with the Orient. As such, Moorish synagogues provided visual documentation of European Jewry's conformity to contemporary eclectic tastes, as well as their deep faith in the process of legal and social emancipation.

Yet, as informative as these works are, they exhibit some of the same limitations evident elsewhere. Lerner ignores the larger demographic and socio-economic context in which Italian synagogues were built, and refrains from evaluating his findings within a larger European framework. Kalmar, on the other hand, generalizes about the Jews' attraction to an oriental self-identity, which appeared to be similar for urban Jews in west and central Europe alike. However, Jewish self-identities – all identities – are highly sensitive to internal and external stimuli, all of which differed depending on national and local contexts. Moorish structures, in other words, might have meant something completely different to a Dutch Jew than to a German Jew, and might have been received differently by a Dutch gentile than by a German one – not inconceivable if one considers the two political and ideological milieus.

This is not to say, however, that the works by Lerner, Kalmar, and others are not useful. On the contrary, they have given the field of synagogue architecture a much needed breath of fresh air. But we need a more thorough understanding of the different social backgrounds and local contexts in which these buildings were constructed in order

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<sup>29</sup> Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2001), 80.

to better understand their significance. The discussions that surrounded synagogue construction and representation offer valuable information in this respect. They illustrate that the tensions between acculturation and Jewish distinctiveness, between modernization and religious tradition, varied quite extensively in the urban centers of northern Europe. Debates over the abolition of women's galleries, the introduction of organs, public display, architectural style, location and spatial lay-out all surfaced as topics of concern, making synagogues highly contested spaces that can give us insight into the construction of Jewish identities in the modern period. The following pages will attempt to elaborate on these discourses in three different urban contexts. By taking into account the diverse socio-economic and political status of the Jews in Amsterdam, London, and Berlin, their demographic movements, and their concerns over Jewish self-representation, these cities' synagogues might just tell a more complicated narrative about north-European Jewry than previously assumed. Buildings, from this perspective, really are fascinating story-tellers.

### **Northern Europe**

The emergence of the synagogue as “the most important public arena for the expression of a Jewish identity”<sup>30</sup> first took place in the capital of the Dutch Republic, as early as the 1670s. Both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities in Amsterdam built stately, freestanding synagogues, unlike those anywhere else in Europe at this time. In a number of German towns, too, protected Jews – particularly those connected to court Jews – erected respectable prayer houses, although not nearly on the same scale and

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<sup>30</sup> Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 2. The real irony worth pointing out here is that the less Jews went to synagogue – due to increasing secularization – the more important synagogues became in advertising Jewishness.



magnitude as those in Amsterdam. While these synagogues proclaimed new possibilities – they will be examined more closely in chapter two – they were clearly exceptions, forerunners to the explosion of monumental synagogue building in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The majority of scholars who have written about these buildings have concluded they were markers of European Jewry's exodus from the ghetto, "the bearers of the message of the new Judaism of modern times in free and equal societies . . . publicly redefining Jewishness in the new socio-political context [and expressing] a feeling of gratitude toward the government that had liberated them."<sup>31</sup> Especially in Germany, they argue, where the majority of Jews became urban and middle-class in the nineteenth century, but emancipation remained incomplete, their communicative function was particularly explicit. Having acquired the financial means and the legal rights to build on a large scale, Jewish communities welcomed the opportunity to erect synagogues in a style that has come to be known as "the architecture of Emancipation." The Oranienburgerstraße synagogue is often presented as the prime example. The building reflected the faith in emancipation quite explicitly: it was a spectacular structure purposefully designed to catch the eye of the city dweller and impress him or her with its sheer scale and grandeur. In fact, one of Knoblauch's earlier designs was rejected because the building was insufficiently visible to the public and the architect was sent back to the drawing board. The final result was a synagogue that highlighted the contemporary west European attraction to the Orient, but that also emphasized the Jews' difference, advertising their confidence about their future in the fatherland. It became the

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<sup>31</sup> Lerner, 1. See also Edina Meyer-Maril, "Synagogue Architecture in Germany from the Period of Emancipation to World War I," in *Catalogue: Synagogues in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Tel Aviv: Bet ha-tefutsot 'al shem Nahum Goldman, 1982), 39-41.

ultimate expression of the “modern” Jew, i.e., of the cultivated, prosperous burgher who had successfully acquired *Bildung*.<sup>32</sup>

On closer examination, however, the story of this new urban phenomenon is more complex. If monumental synagogues were simply a visual testimony to European Jewry’s successful movement toward acculturation and integration, then the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue should attest to a success story in German-Jewish relations, which is an incomplete reading of the situation indeed. The synagogue, for one, was built at a time when numerous *Judengesetzen* [Jewish clauses] limited Jewish liberties and when the question of Jewish political emancipation was still hotly debated. Gratitude, in other words, was not the primary message conveyed by the new synagogue. To better understand what these buildings really meant for Jewish men and women, and how they were used in their new public role, we need to broaden our gaze to include not only the buildings themselves but also how they functioned in the wider historical context in which they were built. Synagogues after all, as Lindsay Jones has argued with respect to all buildings, mean nothing in and of themselves; only through the dynamic interactions that take place between the structure and the contemporaries who interact with them is meaning generated.<sup>33</sup> A proper analysis of synagogues, then, needs to include close attention to space and place.

A greater sensitivity to spatiality and locality suggests that these emerging landmarks tell very different stories about north European Jewish communities and

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<sup>32</sup> *Bildung*, for which there is no real English synonym, is an all-encompassing term for cultural sophistication, education, and cultivation, including character formation and moral growth. For Jews, *Bildung* served as an entrée into the culture of the German bourgeoisie and was an affirmation of one’s “Germanness.” Marion Kaplan argues that *Bildung* was highly appealing to German Jews as one did not have to be born into it. “It could be acquired at the university, in cultured circles, and in a family of good breeding. Moreover, *Bildung* could be joined to Jewish ethnic and religious identities.” See Marion A. Kaplan, ed., *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 182.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, Introduction.

consequently ask us to be careful with easy generalizations about their meaning. In Berlin, for instance, the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue was more than a visual declaration of comfort and prosperity. It was used as a political weapon to convince the German public of the Jews' "worthiness" as *gebildete Bürger* – culturally sophisticated, bourgeois citizens loyal to the German state. Jews had kept their end of the bargain: they had discarded the shackles of the medieval ghetto and become "true Germans," and they therefore deserved full legal and social emancipation. More importantly, when we shift our attention away from the building itself and focus instead on the context in which it was built, used, and talked about, then it also becomes a product of the Berlin *Gemeinde's* sense of insecurity rather than confidence, of its consciousness of the fragility of its status rather than its conviction that full emancipation was only a matter of time. Berlin, after all, had witnessed a difficult and prolonged process of granting rights to Jews over the course of the nineteenth century, and now that Germany was moving toward unification the question of who "belonged" to the nation became increasingly pertinent. Indeed, the Jewish question – which addressed how Jews "fit in" to state and society – became a fiercely debated issue in German public discourse (and would remain so after unification in 1871, when the discussions over what constituted *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* intensified). Building a spectacular synagogue in a time like this, then, was intimately tied to the socio-political status of German Jewry. Much was at stake, and because of this the public aspect of the new building, its size and location, and its interior lay-out, became contentious issues. Some were concerned by the hateful comments spewed out by antisemites such as Heinrich von Treitschke, who proclaimed he was not surprised that "the most beautiful prayer house of the German capital [was] a

synagogue.” For Treitschke, the opulence and centrality of the Oranienburgerstraße building was visual evidence of what he had proclaimed all along, namely that “the Jews in Germany were more powerful than in any other west-European country.”<sup>34</sup> Its oriental style, after all, only confirmed the Jews’ inherent foreignness and their unwillingness to conform to German cultural mores. Others were less worried that the “exoticism” of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue would provoke an antisemitic backlash, and instead considered the building an absolute necessity in order to display the community’s progress. And yet others complained that the obsession with Reform – which manifested itself among others in the remodeling of the interior after Christian churches – signaled the downfall of Judaism and the loss of a Jewish identity. In short, synagogues in Berlin, particularly the Oranienburgerstraße building, became the medium through which Jews publicly debated their political and ideological ambitions, giving us clues about manifestations of Jewish identity in the German context.

By placing synagogues at the center of its narrative, this investigation asks that we refine certain assumptions regarding the German-Jewish experience. For instance, a number of historians have argued that the transition from traditional to modern life was accompanied by the loss and neglect of Jewish customs and rituals, thereby suggesting that European Jews repeatedly and increasingly minimized their Jewishness.<sup>35</sup> This

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<sup>34</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, “Herr Graetz und sein Judenthum,” quoted in Hermann Simon’s *Die Neue Synagoge Berlin: Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft* (Berlin: Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum, 1992), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Studies on religious reform and orthodox movements are an important exception to this historiographical trend, as is the work by Marion Kaplan and Jay R. Berkovitz. Further analyses of German-Jewish historiography can be found in Michael A. Meyer, “Recent Historiography on the Jewish Religion,” *LBIYB* 35 (1990): 3-16; Meyer, “Jews as Jews versus Jews as Germans: Two Historical Perspectives,” *LBIYB* 36 (1991): 15-22; Evyatar Friesel, “The German-Jewish Encounter as a Historical Problem: A Reconsideration,” *LBIYB* 41 (1996): 263-275; Christhard Hoffmann, “The German-Jewish Encounter and German Historical Culture,” *LBIYB* 41 (1996): 277-290; Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

historiographical pattern, argues Robin Judd, has been particularly discernable in scholarly investigations of German Jewry, which have tended to “push Jewish religious practices to the margins of Germany’s tumultuous political history and presume that the onset of secularization and modernization made religious Judaism and its practices ‘practically meaningless’ for most Jews living in western and central Europe.”<sup>36</sup> However, as Judd and the present study show, religious rituals and practiced Judaism not merely continued to be important to Jewish life; they became part of the public domain and of public discourse. The conspicuousness of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue suggests that German Jews were not always timid, self-effacing, or apologetic about their Jewishness.<sup>37</sup> On the contrary, they refashioned their Jewishness to meet the socio-cultural demands of their time and, by doing so, were quite bold in their approach. An examination of how monumental synagogues were built, used, and understood in nineteenth-century Berlin thus participates in calling into question one of the master narratives of German-Jewish history.

In contrast to Germany, synagogues in England tell quite a different story. In London synagogues were used not as political tools to gain legal equality, as was the case in Berlin, but were designed to protect and maintain the status quo that Jews had already enjoyed for a long time. Building committee minutes reveal that the Anglo-Jewish community deliberately built houses of worship – including the Reform congregation –

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<sup>36</sup> Robin Judd, *Contested Rituals: Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843-1933* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 9. The supposed marginalization of religious Judaism due to forces of modernization and secularization, contends Judd, is an argument put forth, among others, in Shulamit Volkov’s, “The Ambivalence of *Bildung*: Jews and Other Germans,” in *The German-Jewish Dialogue Reconsidered: A Symposium in Honor of George L. Mosse*, ed. by Klaus L. Bergahn (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) and in Michael Brenner’s, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> The notion that German Jews were meek and self-effacing in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century has been popularized, among others, by Hannah Arendt and Raphael Mahler, and remnants of it can still be found in the works of David Vital, Shulamit Volkov, and Michael Brenner.

that did not stand out, but that instead conformed to the existing urban environment so as not to attract too much attention. Anglo-Jewry had fared very well, not least because of the general indifference shown towards Jews by British gentiles. The former had readily adopted British societal norms and felt quite at home in the commercial capital of the world. They had internalized contemporary Victorian codes regarding appropriate public and private display, and in synagogue design this translated into aesthetic composure rather than flamboyance, into a religiously distinctive interior and a typically English exterior.

The United Synagogue in particular dominated the planning and design of new religious buildings in London during the last decades of the nineteenth century. This body, founded in 1870, joined together the city's major Ashkenazic congregations.<sup>38</sup> One of its main functions was to provide religious accommodations for London's Jews. It encouraged existing and new congregations to acquire membership by offering potentially large sums of money to help build a new synagogue. In return, local congregations relinquished a great deal of control as they lost their religious and economic autonomy. Unification, among others, meant loss of ownership of the building and loss of choice over its location and design.<sup>39</sup> As the majority of congregations lacked substantial financial resources, they usually agreed to allow the United Synagogue to take the reigns. And, aiming for a greater degree of communal centralization, the United

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<sup>38</sup> The aim of the United Synagogue, which was established by an Act of Parliament in 1870, was three-fold. It sought to provide a financial framework and an overall structure for the growing number of orthodox synagogues in the London area. Second, it aimed to carry out social and philanthropic work in the community at a level that the individual synagogues found difficult to maintain. Lastly, the United Synagogue was to provide religious facilities for the orthodox Jewish community by assisting in the formation of new congregations as the Jewish population moved into new residential areas. Its control over synagogue architecture in London since the 1870s will be discussed at length in chapter three.

<sup>39</sup> See Judy Glasman's "London Synagogues and the Jewish Community, c. 1870-1900," 19.

Synagogue gladly did so. By employing its own architect-surveyor and by setting up a separate building committee, it rendered synagogue building a matter of central control.

The result of this authority over planning and design was the addition of a significant number of religious buildings in London, the majority of which, however, while often lavishly decorated on the inside, lacked the exterior splendor seen in other European cities. Instead, elegant restraint in a familiar eclectic style became the preferred model for middle-class Jews and East European immigrants alike. Even the design of the new West End Synagogue, built in 1879 for well-to-do Jews, was selected “with the sole view of producing a pleasing composition, with enough of the Eastern feeling to render it suggestive, and enough of the Western severity to make it appropriate for a street building in an English town.” The building and finance committees of the Central Synagogue (1870), too, specified that the decorative oriental features be modified. By and large Moorish elements, which according to *The Builder* had “almost universally been adopted for modern synagogues,” were, according to the architect George Audsley, “inappropriate for a Jewish place of worship.”<sup>40</sup> The United Synagogue thus permitted the “suggestion” of oriental roots but stayed away from any explicit announcement. The goal was predominantly to construct pleasing but unpretentious edifices that attested to Jewish self-sufficiency and good citizenship. Restraint and respectability, with regard to the buildings’ public appearance as well as to the behavior of the Jews in general, were considered the best response to a growing Jewish presence in the city.

Victorian synagogue architecture was equally driven by demographics. The significant growth of the Jewish population – primarily due to immigration – and the geographical dispersal of middle-class Jews to neighborhoods in west and north London

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<sup>40</sup> *The Builder* (Sept. 12, 1874): 773.

rendered the building of modest-sized district synagogues far more effective than the erection of one monumental structure. Jews simply lived too far apart to congregate in one place, and building a synagogue on the scale and magnitude as that in the Oranienburgerstraße would almost certainly invite dwindling numbers of worshippers. If the US was going to keep London Jewry observant, and if they were going to secure communal revenue, they could only do so by providing Jews with a multitude of synagogues – a challenge that demanded financial prudence. London synagogue architecture was thus determined by cultural conformity as well as by pragmatism.

In Amsterdam an altogether different story unfolds.<sup>41</sup> Amsterdam Jewry distinguished itself from other urban communities (including in Holland itself) by refraining completely from building monumental synagogues. The Amsterdam community, around 30,000 in 1869,<sup>42</sup> was surprisingly passive in erecting new houses of

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<sup>41</sup> One benefit of the analysis presented here is its contribution to putting nineteenth-century Dutch Jewry on the map. Whereas the Jews of Imperial Germany have received the attention of many scholars – most of whom were trying to find answers to the origins of the Holocaust or wanted to reclaim a history that had been so brutally destroyed – Dutch Jews during this time remain an unexplored topic. Historians who have written on the Jews of Holland – in America, Israel, Germany, as well as France – have focused primarily on the Golden Age or on the Nazi occupation, while the second half of the nineteenth century continues to be a comparatively unexplored era. This is less true for Dutch-Jewish historiography, which is more developed on this period, although it is primarily concerned with the growing socialist sentiments among the Jewish working class and the beginning of unionization in the 1890s. A discussion of synagogue building within the Amsterdam community will, I hope, contribute to giving Dutch Jewry a voice in the English-speaking world. For a history of Dutch Jewry see, among others, J. C. H. Blom, R. G. Fuks-Mansfeld, and I. Schöffner, eds., *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002); Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987); Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); J. van den Berg and Ernestine G.E. van der Wall, eds, *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Studies and Documents* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988); Jozeph Michman, *The History of Dutch Jewry during the Emancipation Period, 1787-1815: Gothic Turrets on a Corinthian Building* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995); Bob Moore, *Victims and Survivors: The Nazi persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Louis de Jong, *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Amsterdam was the home to around 30,000 Jews in 1869, 44% of the total Jewish population in Holland and more than 11% of the city population. This increased to almost 55,000, 56% and 13% respectively in 1889. This growth, argue J. C. H. Blom and J. J. Cahen, was not due not to immigration, but to the



worship, and the few that did emerge were comparatively modest structures tucked away between private residences. Independent *hevra* shuls, however, abounded, most of which were converted homes to which a new façade was added. Furthermore, the new community buildings that did arise did not assume the same public role as in Berlin and London. Several explanations account for this exceptional position, the first of which concerned the lack of financial resources. Budgets were constantly strained by the community's unusually large and poor proletariat, a significant contingent of which needed poor relief. In 1880, when a reader of the Jewish weekly *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* asked why there were no new synagogues being built in Amsterdam at a time when "London, Liverpool, Paris, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main all witnessed the emergence of considerable, dignified and richly decorated buildings," a fact he found "preposterous," the editors replied dryly that "the community suffers a total debt of approximately fl. 92,000" and could simply not afford to build.<sup>43</sup> The priorities of this city's leadership lay not with designing state of the art edifices, but with providing its largely working-class population with more urgent necessities.

Moreover, Jewish community leaders did not feel pressured to build a grand synagogue in order to make a political statement to the non-Jewish public in favor of legal equality. "Dutch Judaism does not have political objectives," wrote the weekly

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urbanization of Dutch Jews from the provinces, a high birth rate combined with low death rate – two effects of the booming diamond trade – and to improved census procedures. See J. C. H. Blom and J. J. Cahen, "Jewish Netherlanders, Netherlands Jews, and Jews in the Netherlands, 1870-1940," in *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, 237.

<sup>43</sup> S. Rose, "Een nieuwe synagoge" [a new synagogue], *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 6: 24 (10 December, 1880): 3. Rose was not satisfied with this reply and stated in a subsequent letter that Amsterdam's Jewish leaders should instead "follow the Englishman who says 'where there is a will there is a way'. . . Holland reclaimed land from the sea, wouldn't it then be possible [for us] to claim a new Jewish synagogue?" That both parties here had legitimate arguments – i.e. regarding the lack of resources, necessity, and desire to initiate building plans – and that the priorities lay elsewhere will be discussed at length in chapter two.

newspaper *Weekblad voor Israëlieten*, “it is foreign to real political struggle.”<sup>44</sup> Dutch Jews had enjoyed full civil rights since 1796, and they lived in a society that considered religious diversity part of its national character. “Formal equality before the law,” argued historians Hans Blom and Joel Cahen, “was never seriously questioned,”<sup>45</sup> neither by Jews nor by gentiles, and consequently there was no *Judenfrage*, no public debate on the place and participation of the Jews in Dutch society. Jews in Amsterdam, as opposed to Berlin, did not need an architecture of emancipation. Besides, the city already owned two large, historic structures, both of which had publicly expressed the comfort and security of the city’s Jews since the late seventeenth century, and which remained in use as the majority of the population continued to live in and around the Jewish neighborhood. In the Dutch capital monumental synagogues thus did not emerge as there was no money for it, nor a real desire on the part of community leaders to make any sort of public statement. Nothing really changed, then, with respect to synagogue building in Amsterdam at a time when the remainder of Europe witnessed the initiation of massive construction plans.

One might argue, even on the basis of these brief remarks, that taking into account the contemporary milieu in which synagogues were constructed and used is *as* important to a proper analysis of European synagogue building as is the examination of their interior and exterior appearance. As Jews and gentiles from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds voiced their opinions over the emergence – or lack thereof – of conspicuous synagogues in their vicinity, particularly in local newspapers and magazines, they inadvertently also commented on their own ideological views. We learn, for instance, that

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<sup>44</sup> “Een Belangrijke Vergadering” [An important meeting], *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* (July 13, 1877): 5.

<sup>45</sup> Blom and Cahen, 268.

the concerns expressed by the Anglo-Jewish middle class over public representation and etiquette far outweighed the interest of the gentile public in Jewish affairs, suggesting that the process of acculturation and integration that Anglo-Jews were trying so hard to obtain was perhaps succeeding more rapidly than they themselves anticipated. In Berlin the opposite seemed to occur. There the bold statement of success made by the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue is deceptive as the debates swirling around the building reveal that Jews were anything but accepted members of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

Building committees, too, in their discussions over architectural style, public image, locality, and reform, touched on much larger issues of Jewish self-representation and self-identity. Their commentary often revealed tensions between on the one hand the urge to acculturate and on the other the desire to maintain a level of Jewish distinctiveness. The heated discussions on the introduction of an organ in the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue, discussed in chapter five, are a good example. While this topic was completely absent among Amsterdam Jews, in Berlin it turned into a public controversy. Many considered an organ an acceptable means to “improve” religious services and a symbol of Judaism’s modernization, but others hesitated as it challenged the prohibition on instrumental music and rendered the service too “Christian.” One solution proposed an organ that was invisible but audible, and that could only be played by a gentile on Shabbat and religious holidays. They tried to mediate between their obligations as Jews and their aspirations as *gebildete deutsche Bürger*. Debates of this kind are valuable as they illuminate very well the nuances with respect to Jewish life in northern Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century – not merely with respect to how Jews saw themselves and wanted to be seen by others, but also to how local

conditions were instrumental in shaping these views. The lack of urban dispersal and financial resources, the weakness of Reform, and the absence of an obsession to fully integrate into Dutch society, rendered the discussions over what kind of space the synagogue should be quite different in Holland than in Germany. Synagogues, in other word, were contested spaces in which Jews negotiated their identities as Jews and as Germans, Dutchmen, and Englishmen, and they reflect quite interestingly how differently Jews dealt with questions over emancipation, acculturation, and integration.

Indeed, comparing synagogue building in three different urban contexts opens up new ways of thinking about the Jews and Jewish modernization. Until recently, a comparative dimension has been largely absent from the field of Jewish studies. With few exceptions, historians who have chosen the Jews as their subject matter have been reluctant not only to compare Jewish communities across space and time – what Todd Endelman has called an “internal comparison”; they have also shied away from comparing Jews with gentiles, particularly within different national contexts (the “external comparison”).<sup>46</sup> The result has been an impressive body of literature increasingly sensitive to issues of gender, ethnicity, and spatiality, but one that focuses either primarily on Jews within a particular geographical domain, or that offers a grand narrative in which the diversity of the Jewish experience is reduced to a uniform model.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Todd M. Endelman, ed., *Comparing Jewish Societies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 1. See also Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov, “Introduction: Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space,” *Jewish Social Studies* 11: 3 Spring 2005): 1-8, 162-163.

<sup>47</sup> Jakob Katz’s germanocentric analysis of Jewish modernization, in which European communities followed the German trajectory, comes to mind here. Katz’s model has been convincingly challenged, particularly in Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein’s edited volume *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson’s *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), both of which illustrated the plurality of “paths” to emancipation. What made these volumes so influential was precisely their comparative approach. It brought together scholars, each of whom specialized in the history of the Jews within a particular national context, and showed that emancipation

However, escaping established frameworks in Jewish historiography by means of crossing conceptual boundaries can be extremely fruitful. It can expose both the complexity and diversity of the local circumstances in which Jews lived, as well as the more general patterns that emerged across national borders. Moreover, a comparative analysis allows us to ask new questions and find more finely tuned answers to old ones.<sup>48</sup> An examination of the debates surrounding the construction, representation, and use of nineteenth-century synagogues, and the receptivity on the part of the Jewish and gentile population to a growing Jewish presence in the city, has thereby the potential to reveal distinctive as well as shared patterns. It shows us, for instance, that Jews across northern Europe increasingly partook in the processes of economic and cultural *embourgeoisement*, but that Dutch Jews – and Holland at large – arrived at this stage very late and only partook in it to a degree. The Amsterdam Jewish population remained largely working-class and its large number of poor consumed a significant portion of the communal budget. Preoccupied with providing assistance rather than with displaying bourgeois sophistication, it was in no hurry to initiate new building plans. Moreover, since the majority of Jews continued to live in and around the old Jewish quarter and did not establish suburban Jewish enclaves, access to the existing synagogues remained easy. A comparative approach also recognizes that large-scale building initiatives and monumental synagogues across Europe were visual expressions of the Jews' sense of security, but that architecture served very different ideological and political objectives according to national context. It shows that social emancipation and full acceptance remained problematic for Jews in Amsterdam, London, and Berlin alike, but that the

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outside of Germany was not a unitary and linear process. They were instrumental in producing a paradigm shift in Jewish historiography.

<sup>48</sup> Endelman, 14.

intensity in desire for this and the reasons for why it remained a challenge, were quite different in each case. A comparative approach thus acknowledges the shared aspects of Jewish modernization, but highlights the diversity in experience.

Before we listen to the stories that these religious buildings have to tell, however, let us first begin with an introduction of European synagogue architecture in the early modern period.

## Chapter II

### “He Who Would See a World in Little, Let Him Come Here and Gaze!” Synagogues and Gentile Responses in Early Modern Europe

When John Greenhalgh, on a visit to London in the spring of 1662, entered the Creechurch Lane synagogue, he was both excited and apprehensive. He had been invited by Samuel Levi, the rabbi of the city’s small Sephardi community, who had told this curious gentile that “if [he] had a desire to see their manner of worship, though they did scarce admit of any, their Synagogue being strictly kept with three doors one beyond another, he would give [him] such a ticket, as, upon sight thereof, their porter would let [him] in upon their next Sabbath Day in the morning being Saturday.”<sup>1</sup> Greenhalgh, who “made show as though [he] were indifferent, but inwardly hugged the good chap,” gladly took up the offer and set out for the synagogue on the early morning of April 22. He described his experience in a letter written to his friend Thomas Crompton:

I was at first a little abased to venture alone amongst all them Jews; but my innate curiosity to see things strange spurring me on, made me confident even to impudence. I rubbed my forehead, opened the inmost door, and taking off my hat (as instructed) I went in and sat me down amongst them; but Lord (Thomas *frater*) what a strange, uncouth, foreign, and to me barbarous sight was there, I could have wished Thomas that you had then sat next me, for I saw no living soul, but all covered, hooded, guized, veiled Jews, and my own plain bare self amongst them. The sight would have frightened a novice, and made him to have run out again . . . and though to me at first, it made altogether a strange and barbarous show, yet me thought it had in its kind, I know not how, a face and aspect of venerable antiquity . . . I was a curious and critical spectator of all things there, and when I came to my Chamber in the afternoon I wrote down the particulars in my notebook, while fresh in memory.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Greenhalgh, “Mr. Jo. Greenhalgh to his Friend, Mr. Thomas Crompton. A Visit to the Jewish Synagogue established in London,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 10 (1924), 49. Subsequent quotations by Greenhalgh come from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Whereas Greenhalgh offered a description of the synagogue somewhat later in his letter, his first impression was not concerned with the building itself, but by the events surrounding it. To this observer, the meaning of the synagogue, and the way he would remember it, was produced not by the bricks and mortar of the actual building, but by the sights and sounds of the activities taking place inside it. Jews immersed in prayer, their bodies swaying back and forth, the voice of the hazan singing Hebrew chants, all played a role in how Greenhalgh experienced this synagogue. For this visitor, who came from a well-to-do Protestant milieu in which austerity, order, and silent reverence were generally the norm during Sunday services, the events appeared uncivilized and foreign – so foreign, in fact, that in his mind a less prepared observer might be scared out of his wits. However, while he translated the religious rituals taking place into a “strange and barbarous show,” he also found them highly appealing as they conjured up a distant past, of which Greenhalgh felt he was witnessing some precious remnants. His response to this building, then, was deeply ambivalent, as he felt both “strangely, uncouthly, unaccustomedly moved,” observing with “tears in [his] eyes those banished Sons of Israel standing in their ancient garb but in a strange land,” while simultaneously recognizing his aversion to this spectacle: “I felt such a reluctance in me, as that having in part satisfied my Curiosity by seeing their manner of Service once, my heart would in no wise give me to go again amongst those Unbelievers, in that place where my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whom is all my hope and trust for ever, was not owned.” For Greenhalgh, “that place” was still a site of transgression: while mysterious and alluring – as all places of vice are – it had better be avoided.



Descriptions like Greenhalgh's are valuable, first of all, because they give us information about the location, size, height, design, and function of north-European synagogues in the early modern period. They consequently reveal much about the Jews' historical and cultural position within their local community and about the relationships with their gentile neighbors. Jewish prayer houses during this time were generally small and obscured from public view, and not much is known about them except for the data provided by the occasional reference in local community records or detailed city maps. Contemporary travelogues are therefore a welcome addition when gathering information about seventeenth and eighteenth century synagogues, especially when it comes to buildings that later were transformed to serve other purposes or that simply disappeared.<sup>3</sup> Detailed descriptions like Greenhalgh's thus allow for a lively and detailed visualization of places that have long since been lost – the Creechurch Lane congregation, for instance, exchanged their rented quarters for the newly constructed Bevis Marks synagogue in the fall of 1701.

An additional merit of travel accounts is the information they provide about the occupants of these religious spaces, Jews and gentiles alike. Greenhalgh wrote he “counted about or above a hundred right Jews . . . all gentlemen (merchants). [He] saw not one mechanic person of them [and] most of them [were] rich in apparel. . . they have a quick piercing eye, and look as if of strong intellectuals; several of them are comely, gallant, proper gentlemen. I knew many of them when I saw them daily upon the Exchange and the Priest there too, who is also a merchant.” While Greenhalgh again

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Ackroyd, for instance, in his *London, the Biography*, mentions in passing how in Old Jewry a mayor's house was turned into a synagogue, after which it became a house of friars, a nobleman's house, a merchant's house, and then a “wine tavern” known as the Windmill. Buildings changed occupants quite frequently, and contemporary descriptions help us keep track of their movements. See *London, the Biography* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2000).

exhibits ambivalence towards the scene – the worshipers are both gentlemanly and uncivilized, devout as well as deviant, intellectual as well as ignorant of their own sins – his descriptions shed some light on the socio-economic status of the London Sephardim in the 1660s, a very small but prosperous community deeply immersed in commerce. Gentiles, too, were among the occupants, mostly as spectators. To his great relief, Greenhalgh noticed two other non-Jews in the men’s prayer room, one of whom he recognized as a local shopkeeper. While keeping a low profile, Sephardim thus allowed curious gentiles to come and observe their services.

The third and most important factor that renders early modern travelogues so valuable concerns the insight they offer into the perceptions of contemporary observers, not merely with regard to the presence of Jewish religious structures in the city, but also with regard to the place and participation – i.e., the level of toleration – of Jews in north-European societies at large. As travel became a marker of social status, taking the well-to-do to foreign places for the sole purpose of enriching their cultural sophistication, they inescapably came into contact with unfamiliar sights and sounds.<sup>4</sup> And it is those experiences that break with the established routines and practices of everyday life and that come across as deviant, that oftentimes find their way into diaries, travelogues, and tourist guides, many of which consequently talk about Jewish neighborhoods and Jewish religious buildings. As elite Europeans explored the continents, gazing at unfamiliar scenes and cityscapes, they shared in writing why they found these sights so appealing or

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<sup>4</sup> Travel had been a marker of social status in pre-modern societies, but it was generally closely tied to work, business, or health. Visits to spas, for instance, or pilgrimages were causes for travel, as were the buying and selling of goods and the desire for exploration. Patterns of travel for sole purpose of pleasure and culture became widespread only for the well-to-do over the course of the 1600s and for the professional middle class in the late 1700s. Travel was expected, argues John Urry, “to play a key role in the cognitive and perceptual education of the English upper class.” John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990), 4.

disturbing, allowing us to take a peek into their mindset. The traveler's gaze, John Urry explains, was thus "constructed in relation to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness."<sup>5</sup> For our purposes, then, the tourist's confrontation with Jewish neighborhoods not merely provided a geographic analysis, illuminating how and where synagogues were built; because Jews and Jewish houses of worship were treated as deviant, they also shed light on what was considered "normal." Synagogues, besides from being "rational" spaces, served as experiential spaces in which the observer's response to them reveal as much information about Christians as they do about Jews.<sup>6</sup>

All these components – the synagogue buildings themselves, the socio-political and urban context of which they were part, and public responses – will be discussed in this chapter, and early modern travelogues will function as an important tour guide. Combined they will introduce the reader to northern European synagogue architecture in the early modern period. That Jewish houses of worship in Germany occupied very different places within the built environment than in the Dutch Republic or in England, and that central European travelers responded quite differently to these structures than did west European observers, prevents an easy analysis. Even within the German lands themselves a great variety in synagogue building can be observed, as Jewish communities enjoying protection from the local magistrates faced fewer restrictions than those that were barely tolerated. The variation in socio-economic status of our travelers, too,

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<sup>5</sup> Urry, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Michel de Certeau made a similar point when he distinguished between the "concept of the city" (the idea of the city that is familiar to us through urban planning, and the writing of urban reformers about geography, traffic problems, land-use conflicts, and housing) and the "fact" of the city, i.e. how it is known to us through everyday experiences, novels and paintings, slang, and puns. Space, in de Certeau's view, is therefore actively produced by its inhabitants. Travelogues and diaries describe both; they provide geographic analyses as well as the everyday life experiences of the city's inhabitants. See, for instance, de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

complicates matters, as does the impact of different intellectual movements such as the enlightenment or sentimentalism.

Taking these factors into account, however, we can still recognize certain patterns. With the clear exception of Holland, north European synagogues up to the early 1700s were generally indistinguishable from other buildings and remained very private. While oftentimes lavishly decorated inside, the exterior exhibited no elaborate signs of Jewish worship and usually blended in with the surrounding architecture. A reluctance to attract unwelcome attention, a lack of money, and the possibility of being evicted from rented quarters at any time produced synagogues that appeared unappealing to the gentile visitor, and they consequently received only occasional mention in travel accounts. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, synagogues became more aesthetically pronounced within the urban landscape, although in German-speaking areas this only occurred in places where Jews received protection from local rulers. In Britain, too, synagogues gained visibility and attracted a growing number of curious tourists. Still, none compared to the prominence of the Amsterdam synagogues, which had been sites on the tourist map of Europe since the 1670s. And none – not even the synagogues of the Dutch capital – compared to the monumental structures that were to arise in the second half of the nineteenth century.

With respect to gentile responses, too, a few preliminary suggestions can be made. Non-Jews generally responded very positively to newly built and conspicuous synagogues – such as London’s Bevis Marks, the city’s first purpose-built Sephardi synagogue (1701), or Amsterdam’s Spanish Portuguese synagogue (1675) – but expressed long-held stereotypes about the Jews. Gentiles appreciated the buildings for

their architectural value, which was not unrelated to the fact that they were designed and built exclusively by Christians. However, gentiles often resented the public statement that these structures made, one that communicated aesthetically the Jews' sense of security and confidence. Here again Dutch comments – as well as a growing number of British ones from the early 1700s onward – prove the exception as these observers generally came from a milieu that was more accepting of Jews and therefore viewed a Jewish presence in the city in a much more favorable light. Realizing that the unprecedented prosperity of the Dutch Republic was to a large extent contingent on the presence of “Others,” seventeenth-century Dutch authorities granted Jews an unusual number of privileges. They were more willing to embrace a foreign element into the realm of the familiar, a sentiment, mind you, that was based more on economic concerns than on heart-felt sympathies toward the Jews. Consequently, Dutch tourists, coming from a cosmopolitan climate, were oftentimes perplexed to see how Jews lived and worshiped in the neighboring communities east of them, where many Jews were still forced to settle in assigned quarters that were locked after sundown.

A last suggestion, before we move into a more detailed discussion, concerns the relationship between Jewish religious buildings and tolerance. In the case of Amsterdam, its two prominent synagogues became acceptable and familiar structures integrated within the urban landscape, and one might argue that their very presence expanded, rather than tested, the limits of toleration. Foreign visitors, who stereotyped Jews as poor and “uncultured,” oftentimes could not help but gaze at these urban landmarks, causing them to experience a *mélange* of emotions. They were baffled, surprised, confused, or outright annoyed by what they witnessed inside and outside the boundaries of the local Jewish

quarter. In so doing, their views about the presence of “Others” were challenged as they were asked to acknowledge a link between Jews on the one hand, and beautifully built monumental architecture on the other, a relationship previously considered implausible. Christians, in particular, had difficulty connecting the values associated with this type of architecture, such as aesthetic sophistication and religious respectability, with Jews. Christian discourse, after all, had consistently depicted the Jews as the epitome of cultural primitiveness and incivility, incapable of producing refined works of art. Consequently, many Christians visiting the Amsterdam synagogues lauded the buildings for their elegance, but denounced the people who actually built and used them because they could not harmonize what in their minds constituted unequivocal opposites. Many thus refused to extend the positive responses to the object (the synagogue) to the Jews. However, despite many Christians’ disapproval of a monumental Jewish architecture, the very presence of highly visible synagogues at the very least exposed them to an alternative reality and at best advanced confessional toleration as they extended the limits of what was considered acceptable within the public realm. From this perspective, urban architecture served as a vehicle for a paradoxical progress toward tolerance.

### **The Tourist Gaze**

Over the course of the seventeenth century, traveling abroad became a fashionable social practice among well-to-do Europeans. The foreign journey was no longer limited to the realms of health or business, but developed into a leisure activity vigorously pursued by men as well as by women, who proudly recounted their experiences in travelogues and diaries. Indeed, observing the novelties of foreign places and cultures

was considered an edifying experience in the higher echelons of European society and undertaking the grand tour consequently became an indispensable part of a young man's education. Touring required close eyewitness observations, especially as returning travelers were expected to share their adventures during dinner parties. The visualization of the travel experience, or as Urry described it, "the development of the gaze,"<sup>7</sup> was thus directly related to the popularization of the grand tour. A growing number of guidebooks appeared to inform travelers of worthwhile places, of the manners and character of other peoples, and of the appropriate ways to conduct themselves when touring. They also alerted readers to less reputable places and to those divergences in customs which, if not anticipated, might cause embarrassment. Frederick von Raumer, for instance, cautioned British gentlemen touring Germany about the lack of comfortable beds. Quoting from an English handbook for travelers, he warned "of the misery to which he will be subjected on this score. A German bed . . . may be compared to an open wooden box, often hardly with enough to turn in, and rarely long enough for a moderate-sized Englishman to lie down in."<sup>8</sup> Travelers, advised Raumer, would be better prepared for touring the continent when informed of such cultural differences in advance.

These guidebooks, besides informing travelers of local customs, promoted new ways of seeing. They encouraged observers to gaze upon landscapes and scenes that were out of the ordinary, inadvertently asking them to make comparisons to their own everyday experiences. During strolls through the park, Sunday excursions to Dissenting churches, or coach rides through the countryside, travelers interpreted sights, sounds, and smells according to their own cultural frame of reference. Tourists, one might say,

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<sup>7</sup> Urry, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick von Raumer, *England in 1841: Being a Series of Letters Written to Friends in Germany . . .* / (London: John Lee, 1842), 183.

became semioticians “reading,” in invisible ink, the urban codes of the places they visited.

London and Amsterdam were popular cities for travelers. While Berlin, with its 55,000 inhabitants, was still an insignificant town at this time, the capitals of England and the Dutch Republic had gained reputations as the most exciting places in the West. By the early 1700s the population of London was ten times that of Berlin, while that of Amsterdam came to approximately 200,000. Both cities, with their busy harbors, impressive cathedrals, royal courts, theaters, and coffee houses became attractive sites on the tourist map of Europe. Samuel Johnson wrote in his diary that one does not tire of London unless one is tired of living,<sup>9</sup> a sentiment that many visitors embraced. Amsterdam, too, having just passed its prime as London began its ascent to prominence, was a magnet for foreign travelers, earning high praise as well as envy in their observations. “Although I shall not hyperbolize or flatter,” exclaimed William Carr in the 1690s, “Amsterdam is certainly one of the beautifullest cities in the world.”<sup>10</sup> These were places of bustling activity, expansion, and culture. It was here that visitors could see and be seen, where they could acquire the appropriate discourse for their dinner conversations once they returned home, and where they could satisfy their curiosity. Visits to the Tower of London, to the Amsterdam Exchange and the Town Hall, even to local prisons or hospitals for the mentally ill, were thus sites of pleasure as well as purpose.

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Richard B. Schwartz, *Daily Life in Johnson's London* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 55.

<sup>10</sup> William Carr, *The Travellours Guide and Historians Faithful Companion: Giving an Account of the most Remarkable things and matters Relating to the Religion, Government, Custom, Manners, Laws, Politics, Companies, Trade, &c. in all the principal Kingdoms, States, and Provinces, not only in Europe, but other parts of the World . . .* (London: for Eben Tracy, 1695), 21.



The first impression of London or Amsterdam that the tired traveler received was not necessarily a pleasant one. Especially with the former, the foul odors, the long waits and corruption in the harbor, and the swarm of strangers surrounding him did not always extend a welcome invitation. One eighteenth-century traveler remarked that “if towns were to be called after the first words which greeted a traveller on arrival, London would be called Damn it!”<sup>11</sup> A Venetian visitor similarly described, although somewhat more delicately, “the sort of soft and stinking mud which abounds here at all seasons, so that the place more deserves to be called *Lorda* [filth] than *Londra* [London].”<sup>12</sup> The stench, cacophony of sounds, and perpetual hustle and bustle sometimes overwhelmed newcomers. Once settled, however, many visitors could not help but be impressed by what they witnessed. Both Amsterdam and London began to develop tourist-friendly infrastructures in the 1700s: stage- and hackney coaches, signposts, raised footpaths for pedestrians,<sup>13</sup> and street lighting rendered these cities increasingly accessible. A story that appeared repeatedly in contemporary travelogues tells of a German prince who arrived in London overjoyed, thinking that the streets had been lit just for him – an indication of the uncommonness of the extent of street lighting.<sup>14</sup> So-called link boys, too, facilitated tourists’ movement through the city streets, especially at night when they assisted tourists to their destinations with the help of torches. In Amsterdam and surroundings, it was especially the extensive network of *trekvaarten* or towing barges, which had been built between 1630 and 1660, that received widespread attention. Drawn by horses, these

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Ackroyd’s *London, the Biography*, 177. Ackroyd unfortunately does not specify the name of the author.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Ackroyd’s *London, the Biography*, 100.

<sup>13</sup> Raised footpaths only appeared in London and not in Amsterdam. This partially explains the appearance of high steps in front of Amsterdam homes, from which residents could step right into their carriages without their attire being soiled by the dirt and grime of the streets.

<sup>14</sup> Schwartz, 11.

*trekvaarten* carried both cargo and passengers from one town to the next, and they were so effective that by the mid-1660s a 400-mile network served much of the western and northern Netherlands. By the 1750s, explains Audrey Lambert, close to 800 *trekvaarten* left Amsterdam weekly for 180 destinations, carrying “[b]usinessmen and administrators, common folk on their family affairs, fuel and raw materials, and manufactured goods . . . with a promptness and certainty which was unequalled in the rest of Europe until the railway age.”<sup>15</sup> We can add tourists to Lambert’s list of passengers, as they made frequent use of this cheap and regular system of mass transport. While travelers suffered common hardships when touring – it took many days of uncomfortable and hazardous travel to cover small distances – in such places as Holland and the south of England “modern” improvements enhanced the travel experience considerably.

Both Amsterdam and London needed to make these kinds of improvements as they became centers of world trade in the early modern period, witnessing enormous population growths – although this happened with London somewhat later than with the Dutch capital, whose stagnation in the early 1700s partially ignited London’s growth spurt.<sup>16</sup> To maintain some form of order in an overcrowded city, and to allow it to grow to its full economic potential, both London and Amsterdam required such urban innovations as the *trekvaart* or the hackney coach, signposts, and street lights. They

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<sup>15</sup> Audrey M. Lambert, *The Making of the Dutch Landscape: An Historical Geography of the Netherlands* (London: Academic Press, 1985), 203, 220. These barges, hauled by men but replaced by horses, functioned best with regular, straight canals, which explains the design of the Dutch canal system still in place today.

<sup>16</sup> The Navigation Act of 1651, which was intended to encourage British international trade at the expense of the Dutch, contributed to the decline of the Dutch Republic and of Amsterdam’s position on the world market. It demanded goods to be imported directly into England, without using Amsterdam as an entrepôt, and to be carried on English ships only (or on those owned by the country from which the goods originated). Todd M. Endelman explains that the issuing of this Navigation Act was directly related to Menasseh ben Israel’s 1655 visit to Cromwell on behalf of the Amsterdam Jewish community, to convince the latter of the need to allow Jewish merchants to settle in London to protect their livelihood. See Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 15.

facilitated the traffic of goods and people and rendered these capitals both increasingly accessible and appealing to city-dwellers. As for London, wrote John Pugh in his *Life of Jonas Hanway*, they “introduced a degree of elegance and symmetry into the streets of the metropolis that is the admiration of all Europe and far exceeds anything of the kind in the modern world.”<sup>17</sup> Urban improvements thus were a direct result, as well as a sign, of these metropolises’ wealth and power.

Aside from paying the required visits to well-known attractions, many tourists wandered into less reputable areas – those generally unaffected by urban progress. They had a desire, as do tourists today, to observe sites and scenes that were notorious or out of the ordinary, and to satisfy a curiosity that had often been sparked by hearsay. The Jewish neighborhood was one of these places. While the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam was featured on the tourist’s “must-see” list during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because of its extraordinary synagogues, others too across northern Europe witnessed the gaze of the curious gentile. Whether these areas of Jewish residence were integrated within the city center, as in Amsterdam and The Hague, or assigned to an enclosed section bordering the outer city walls, as in Frankfurt or Mainz, they were frequented by German, Dutch, and British tourists alike. That their readings of one and the same site – in our case, synagogues – varied considerably suggests the social and cultural construction of their gaze and the lack of a universal experience, which pertains to all tourists at all times.<sup>18</sup> Each of our travelers had a different set of assumptions and expectations guiding his or her reading of these religious buildings, and age, social position, occupational and educational background, gender, and nationality all shaped

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<sup>17</sup> John Pugh, *Remarkable Occurrences in the Life of Jonas Hanway*, third edition (London: printed for T. Cadell, 1798), 106.

<sup>18</sup> Urry, 1.

their interpretation. Greenhalgh's description of London's Creechurch Lane synagogue, we might recall, was very much colored by the affluent Christian milieu from which he came, one that valued church decorum and distrusted non-Christian dogma. Different socio-cultural factors, contends critical theorist Lindsey Jones, thus "intrude upon the preparedness that people bring to their respective experience of one and the same architectural configuration" and influence the ways in which architecture is experienced. This suggests that synagogues are susceptible to accommodating a variety of meanings, "each validly posited by a different beholder."<sup>19</sup>

However, despite the fact that gentile responses to synagogues were subject to a widely diverse spectrum of interpretations that can be deconstructed and "unpacked," surprisingly similar response patterns emerged. This can be explained to a large extent by the shared social background from which many of our visitors came. Most were upper-class males from western and central Europe who oftentimes made extensive journeys that lasted for weeks, if not months. Virtually all travelers were well-educated and practicing Christians, and often held firm convictions concerning religious observance, cultural manners, and socio-economic customs. It should therefore come as no surprise that these travelers also expressed strong opinions when observing synagogues, many of which reflected, as we shall see, the cultural codes dominant in the social circles from which they came. In fact, their descriptions oftentimes expose more about the travelers themselves than about the object under scrutiny. When diverse response patterns do

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<sup>19</sup> Lindsey Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison. Volume One: Monumental Occasions. Reflections on the Eventfulness of Religious Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 32- 34. Jones cites Umberto Eco, who referred to buildings as "open works" insofar as they invite multiple meanings, "each validly posited by a different beholder."

emerge, they oftentimes concern the national and cultural context in which our observers matured, constructing very different perceptions of the Jew's place in society.

Before analyzing gentile response patterns, however, let us first explore what visitors typically encountered when they first set foot in a Jewish district. The majority of north-European Jewry up to the early 1700s, with the exception of small Sephardi communities in western port cities and the occasional protected community in the German lands (such as Berlin), was poor and lived in humble conditions. Their settlements were dependent on the goodwill of the local authorities, which could (and did) expel Jews in times of religious fervor and popular discontent. Despite the economic advantages of having Jews around – their predominance in petty trade and money lending benefited the local economy, as did their tax contributions – they were frequently banned altogether or forced to resettle when heightened anti-Jewish sentiments rendered their presence undesirable and “dangerous” to the established order. The synagogues that existed in early modern Europe reveal very well the precarious conditions in which most Ashkenazim lived. These buildings were generally small, intimate, and obscured from public view, providing, in the words of Carol Krinsky, “visual documentation of the Jews’ historic and cultural position within the local community.”<sup>20</sup>

There were a number of causes for their modesty, the first of which concerned poverty. It left Jews without adequate financial resources and most likely unfamiliar with architectural opportunities. Even if funds were available, the lack of Jewish artisans and masons – trades from which Jews were generally excluded – significantly reduced the likelihood of a distinctly Jewish house of worship within a predominantly Christian

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996), 1.

community. Most Jewish communities were also small and therefore not in need of large buildings. The experience of antisemitism, too, had taught Jews the important lesson of avoiding attention and concealing the external evidences of Jewish practice and ritual. Their physical appearance and customs already set them apart, and building a conspicuous synagogue would add another layer of differentiation, jeopardizing their already fragile relationship with Christian locals. “External concealment,” contends Lewis Mumford, “was the price of internal freedom”<sup>21</sup> and was the most rational approach when dealing with unpredictable gentiles. Moreover, in some places Jews were prevented from constructing large houses of worship due to legal regulations. Restrictions on the height of the synagogues and the public display of Jewish symbols reinforced the dominance of the Christian church. Small and secluded synagogues thus provided relative privacy and avoided gentile suspicions of Jews competing with Christian churches.

Another restraint on synagogue architecture was Jewish dependence on Christian landlords. Krinsky explains that “many governments prevented the Jews from owning the land on which their synagogues stood and could fix the rent to be paid the Christian landowner. Under these rules, Jews usually built modest synagogues because a lease could be terminated and the building be taken away with the land, especially if the owner had some influence over the local judiciary.”<sup>22</sup> The need for a prominent synagogue was thus usually absent because the relatively small number of Jews who settled in European towns were not in need of it, and because local policies concerning the Jewish “Other” left most building projects dependent upon the unpredictable disposition of gentile landowners. Also, the exigencies of Jewish worship itself might have contributed to the

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis Mumford, “Toward a Modern Synagogue Architecture,” *The Menorah Journal* 11: 3 (June 1925): 227.

<sup>22</sup> Krinsky, 42.

predominance of small and inconspicuous structures, as it tends to focus not on the external, but rather on the communal activities that took place inside of the shul. The Talmud recommends, after all, that one remain oblivious to one's surroundings during prayer, reducing the desire for an elaborate architectural design. In fact, adds Krinsky, the Talmud is silent on synagogue form and style and does not require prayer houses to look distinctive.<sup>23</sup> Jews also did not need ornate symbolic exteriors to “lure” potential converts into the Jewish faith since Judaism, contrary to Christianity, does not consider proselytization to be part of its divine mission.

Based on these conditions, it is fair to say that, with respect to the exterior, we cannot really talk about a synagogue architectural tradition in the early modern period. The majority of Jewish prayer houses resembled Christian chapels and churches; they were unobtrusive vernacular buildings that blended in with the built environment by adopting local aesthetic styles. Hence we find Gothic synagogues in German areas or Baroque synagogues in mid-1600s Holland, just as we see during this time Renaissance synagogues in Rome and Venice or wooden structures in Poland and Russia. As for the interior, they were oftentimes distinctive and elaborately decorated, depending on the financial resources of the community. Intricate wood carvings, candelabras, and ceiling decorations within the private sphere of the prayer hall were common, as was the adherence to the traditional Ashkenazi or Sephardi floor-plan. The majority of these interiors were hidden behind a religiously neutral façade and concealed from public view.

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<sup>23</sup> Krinsky, 20.

There were, however, exceptions to this pattern.<sup>24</sup> In a number of German towns so-called *Hoffjuden*, or court Jews,<sup>25</sup> rose to great prominence and helped establish charitable institutions, study houses, and synagogues.<sup>26</sup> The Heidereutergasse synagogue of the Berlin Jewish community, built between 1712 and 1714, is an example. It belonged to a small group of privileged Jews, many of whom had settled in Berlin after Leopold I had expelled the Jews from Vienna in 1670. While Jews had previously been prohibited from living in Berlin, they were granted permission to settle there in 1671 by Frederick Wilhelm I, the Great Elector of Brandenburg-Prussia (1640-1688). He welcomed these Viennese exiles, many of whom were experienced in commerce, in an attempt to strengthen the local economy. Berlin, the capital of the Margrave of Brandenburg since 1440, was a modest-sized town of 12,000 inhabitants situated in an economically backward area (fig. 1). It lay far from the maritime routes that allowed cities such as London and Amsterdam to develop highly profitable trading networks. Granting

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<sup>24</sup> In southern Europe, for instance, impressive structures appeared well before the 1800s. The S. Maria della Salute Synagogue in Venice (1631-1648, by Baldassare Longhena) or the medieval synagogues of Toledo, well-known for its spectacular interiors, were instances of large and beautiful synagogues emerging before the age of emancipation.

<sup>25</sup> These court Jews were small in number and, as all of European Jewry at this time, dependent on local rulers. With the rise of absolutism and mercantilist policies, those Jews who were proficient in such trades as minting or money-lending, and who were well-connected to Jewish financiers across Europe, became useful allies to local rulers. Extensive trade networks enabled them to provide much-needed financial resources to support military conflicts in the age of absolutism, and to supply luxury items such as furs and jewelry for the Christian elites. What emerged was a *quid pro quo* relationship between local rulers and their Jewish servants: the latter (including his extended family and his own personnel) would be granted protection from persecution and expulsion in return for their commercial services. This is of course not to imply that court Jews and local rulers stood on an equal footing. The privileges accorded to these *Hoffjuden* were limited and always conditional. However, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this purely economic relationship allowed court Jews to amass great wealth and to rise to positions previously inconceivable in European society.

<sup>26</sup> For more on *Hoffjuden* see Michael A. Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times. Vol. I: Tradition and Enlightenment, 1600-1780* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 123. We should not interpret the phenomenon of court Jews as the first signs of German liberalism or of toleration in the liberal sense. These small groups of Jews were readmitted to German cities because of their economic utility, and the ultimate goal remained their conversion to Christianity. Raison d'état thus dictated the relationship between court Jews and Christian rulers, not a new attitude toward religious and cultural diversity.



permission to Jewish tradesmen to live and work in its midst could benefit local business. Especially after the Thirty Years' War, which had left the area economically weakened and thinly populated, pursuing a generous immigration policy seemed the most pragmatic approach to recovery. The fact that the Prussian monarch was a Calvinist, unconcerned with the wishes of the Lutheran church, was most likely a contributing factor to the Great Elector's leniency toward non-natives.<sup>27</sup> To Frederick Wilhelm, who had spent his youth in Holland and had been exposed to more tolerant attitudes toward religious Others, the economic usefulness of Jews thus outweighed concerns over their religious "idolatry" and "immorality."

The right of residence was initially limited to only fifty families, and to their employees and servants. They settled in a residential neighborhood just north of the river Spree called Alt Berlin. The edict of admission permitted these Viennese immigrants to rent, purchase, and build houses and allowed unlimited trade for an initial period of twenty years. It also consented to the use of a mikveh (ritual bath), a cemetery (bought in 1672 and located on the corner of Großer Hamburger and Oranienburgerstraße), and a community oven. The edict did not, however, grant permission for a synagogue, and tolerated worship in private homes only. Rachel Wischnitzer, an expert on the synagogues of Europe, informs us that before the construction of the Heidereutergasse synagogue these Berlin Jews worshiped at a private chapel maintained by Jost Liebmann (c.1640-1702), jeweler and mint master to Frederick Wilhelm and Frederick III (1688-1696).<sup>28</sup> Liebmann's widow continued this task until her own death, after which the

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<sup>27</sup> Mordechai Breuer, "The Dawn of Early Modern Times," in Meyer's *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 155.

community (now consisting of 117 families) requested permission from the new king of Prussia, Frederick Wilhelm I (1713-1740), to build a community synagogue. The building, dedicated in the presence of the Prussian monarch in 1714, was located at the Heidereutergasse, a small street just beyond the Spandauerstrasse (fig. 2). It was designed in the same sedate northern Protestant Baroque style as the Sephardi and Ashkenazi synagogues of Amsterdam and the Bevis Marks synagogue of London, which was popular in northern Europe in the late 1600s and the early 1700s. This style, which Brian de Breffny described as “reticent yet dignified, splendid yet sedate, serene rather than stern,”<sup>29</sup> served Jews well as it avoided elaborate embellishment. It allowed a dignified design, but one devoid of elements that could be perceived as ostentatious.

The Heidereutergasse synagogue, meant to serve a community of a hundred and eleven families, was built by the Christian master-carpenter Michael Kemmeter, whose works included, among others, the Neue Kirche (New Church) in the Gendarmenmarkt, which was finished in 1708. At approximately thirty feet high, it was a considerable building with tall, round-headed windows (fig. 3). It was a dignified masonry structure, covered by stucco, with a pointed roof and round-headed dormers. The building’s interior, explains Krinsky, was rather typical in that it was single-naved and vaulted,<sup>30</sup> and it followed the traditional Ashkenazi floor plan of a raised bimah in the center of the hall facing the ark on the eastern wall. The women’s entrance was placed on the north side of the building, and interior stairs led to the women’s gallery opposite the ark.<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup> Brian de Breffny, *The Synagogue* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), 136.

<sup>30</sup> Krinsky, 261-2.

<sup>31</sup> Since women could only hear only faintly what was spoken and sung during synagogue services, it was not uncommon to have a “prayer leader” present in the women’s section. Sitting at the partition window, she repeated the prayers to the women. When the women’s section became part of the overall design and overall comforts – such as lighting and audibility – improved, the prayer leader disappeared. See Mordechai Breuer, 40.

main room was tall and rectangular, and included an unusually large bimah for that space; so large, in fact, that the men's pews, which were placed along the central axis of the building, could accommodate only three or four worshipers at a time. The ceiling, from which hung ten chandeliers for illumination, accentuated its centrality even more, as its coved panels came together in an elongated octagonal design right above the bimah. The only element competing for attention was the ark, an elaborate wooden structure with two tiers of columns and lavish curves. Its exuberant design contrasted with the otherwise sedate expression of the building, which in many ways appeared very Protestant – its seating arrangements, for instance, which all faced east, followed a Christian church design. With the ark, however, Kemmeter abandoned the formalities of the Protestant Baroque style and created a lavishly decorated attention-piece.

That this synagogue belonged to privileged Jews becomes clear when we consider the size and central location of the building. A late eighteenth-century drawing by F. A. Calau shows a substantial, free-standing building that stood within the city-center, right next to the residence of a government official. It was built relatively close to the church of St. Mary on land that had been owned by the bishops of Havelberg. Rather than worshipping in small, secluded buildings located in designated Jewish quarters, these Berlin Jews gathered in a dignified synagogue located at a very public site. Their protected status took away some of the traditional incentives for keeping a low profile. This did not mean that Berlin Jewry was not exposed to anti-Jewish sentiments or harassment, but it could at least count on the local ruler's support in times of difficulty, a not inconsiderable asset considering its feeble legal position in German society. Their privileged status is also implied in an engraving of the interior by A. M. Werner, dating

from ca. 1720. It portrays elegantly dressed Jews – men as well as women – chatting in the main prayer hall, suggesting that the Berlin community had sufficient means to acquire the appropriate attire when attending services (fig. 4).

The Berlin community and its Heidereutergasse synagogue were not typical. Most German-Jewish neighborhoods and their synagogues in the early modern period were located near the city limits and had bad reputations. They were frequently considered an unpopular appendix to the urban body: they could be tolerated as long as peace and tranquility prevailed, but in times of distress they were oftentimes seen as the root of all problems, better to be removed altogether.<sup>32</sup> This was the case, for instance, in Cologne, Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Frankfurt am Main, which had expelled the Jews in 1426, 1434, 1499, and 1614 respectively. Town officials frequently re-admitted Jews when local tax revenues and economic vitality dwindled and a Jewish presence became again a necessity. All the Ashkenazim in German-speaking lands were subject to strict legislation at this time – sometimes referred to as *Judenstättigkeit*. These statutes for the Jews determined the number of families that were allowed to settle in town, the area and duration of settlement, and the rate of their annual *Schutzgeld* or protection fee. Special levies, such as transit fees and tolls, or the notorious body tax, were also determined by law, limiting not only mobility, but also marking Jews publicly as different. Local edicts of toleration also included references to religious observance, oftentimes allowing the

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<sup>32</sup> Blainville, who visited Germany in 1705, tells the story of a community uprising in Worms, caused by tensions over privileges between the magistrates and the local population. Tensions were taken out on the local Jews, who were plundered and expelled. “The Year following, upon *Easter-Sunday*, the People of *Worms* demolished the Jewish synagogue there to the ground, maltreated the Jews most unmercifully, and drove them out of their Town, in spite of all the Opposition the Magistrates could make; and that because their Ancestors had crucified Jesus Christ. Is not this a very proper and suitable Proof of true Zeal for the *Christian Religion*, the Burden of which is Charity and Mercy?” Monsieur de Blainville, *Travels through Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. Containing a particular description of the antient and present state of those countries . . .* (London: printed for J. Johnson and B. Davenport, 1767), 125.

free worship of Judaism, but prohibiting public worship, which meant that Jews could congregate in private quarters that remained hidden from public view. The Heidereutergasse synagogue in Berlin, in other words, was rather uncommon.

Most Jews in Germany, then, were subject to rules and regulations that their co-religionists elsewhere in northern Europe – particularly in Holland and England – were unfamiliar with, such as curfews, fines for entering the city, or distinctive clothing. While Jews in Frankfurt were still locked up at night, like a “herd [that] must remain cooped and crowded together, like so many black cattle, till morning,”<sup>33</sup> Jews in Amsterdam and London could dwell wherever they pleased. One might argue that these limitations prevented German gentiles from ever being able to see Jews as anything else than different, as the latter were publicly marked and treated as such. Special legislation, such as the *Leibzoll* (body tax) or residence permits, discriminated against Jews in contrast to other groups in the population, and thereby continued to draw attention to their “otherness.” Singling out Jews only reinforced a negative public opinion.

The upward socio-economic mobility of small number of Jews in such towns as Berlin took place on a much larger scale in the Dutch Republic, particularly in Amsterdam, where the majority of Jews resided. After Holland had liberated itself from Spanish domination in 1572, it assumed an increasingly important role on the commercial world stage and could boast a leading position throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Moore, 419. Mordechai Breuer also informs us that Frankfurt Jews at this time were required to purchase so-called Jews’ tickets, which granted permission to leave the Jewish neighborhood on Sundays and Christian holidays. The level of mobility, in short, differed quite substantially among Jews living in the German lands as opposed to those in England and the Dutch Republic.

<sup>34</sup> “Holland,” in the early modern period, refers to the province of Holland and not to the present-day Netherlands. As in the German-speaking areas, the status of the Jews was determined locally and the province of Holland, due to its prominence in international trade, accorded Jews an unusual number of privileges. This was, however, not the case in all of the Dutch Republic. The city of Utrecht, for instance, where the Union of Utrecht was signed, did not admit Jewish settlement until 1788. This emphasizes the

East India Company, which successfully traded in spices and exotic goods from the Orient, the capital's Exchange Bank (instituted in 1609), and a bustling seaport collectively contributed to what has since become known as the Dutch Golden Age – an age of unprecedented growth in economic power, cultural creativity, and scientific knowledge. The energy and opportunities of Holland attracted many people, and Jews – first Sephardim, later also Ashkenazim – were no exception.

Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Jewish communities in Mokum, as Holland's capital was (and still is) known in local parlance,<sup>35</sup> became one of the most influential in Europe, if not in the world. Their participation in and contribution to the Dutch Republic's central role in international commerce and finance allowed them to cultivate a culturally rich community. Indeed, the conditions in which both Sephardim and Ashkenazim lived and prospered during this time were, in the words of historian Jonathan Israel, quite "a-typical, particularly in the context of Jewish history at large."<sup>36</sup> The first *kehillah* was established in Amsterdam in 1597 by a small number of Spanish-Portuguese families who had come, by way of Antwerp, to Holland as New Christians. Holland, which had thrown off the yoke of Spain two decades before and had renounced its allegiance in the Union of Utrecht in 1581, was an attractive place of refuge for Conversos as it was fervently anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic, and pro-business.<sup>37</sup> They settled on Vlooyenburg, an island in the River Amstel which today is the

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fact that the toleration of Jews (and other religious "deviants") was closely linked to their commercial utility. I will elaborate on this below.

<sup>35</sup> Mokum has become a popular nickname for Amsterdam, used primarily in informal settings. The word originates from the Hebrew word for place, מְקוֹם or *Makom*. While it initially referred to the Jewish district only, over time the name Mokum has come to represent the city as a whole.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, "De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden tot Omstreeks 1750: Demografie en Economische Activiteit," in

J. C. H. Blom's *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1995), 97.

<sup>37</sup> Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 82.

Waterlooplein. By 1620 the city had three Sephardi congregations, *Beth Ja'acob*, *Neve Shalom*, and *Beth Israel*, each of which had a synagogue of its own.<sup>38</sup> These houses of worship, which were located in close proximity to each other on the Houtgracht, were really converted warehouses and thus remained inconspicuous to the public eye. Sir William Brereton, a British traveler who attended a service in one of these synagogues in June of 1634, speaks of “a neat place, an upper room.”<sup>39</sup> He also tells us that at this time three hundred families were residing in Amsterdam,<sup>40</sup> and that they had a street named after them, namely “the Jewstreet.” This comment corresponds to Philip von Zesen, who in his German guidebook of Amsterdam mentions that local Jews, “derer eine zimliche Anzahl hierherum wohnet, ihren Gottesdienst auf Sählen oder grossen Kammern [pflegen],”<sup>41</sup> that is, they worship in nondescript halls or rooms that were most likely rented by the community.

The city's Ashkenazim worshiped in Sephardi synagogues until the mid-1630s, after which they formed a congregation of their own. A financial loan from their Spanish-Portuguese co-religionists, meant as a gentle but firm push to help them establish their own community, led to the purchase of an Ashkenazi cemetery a few years later. There were only a small number of German Jews in Amsterdam at this time, many of whom had left Central Europe as the Thirty Years' War rendered an already difficult existence

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<sup>38</sup> The synagogue of Beth Israel was opened in 1619. Beth Ya'acob, most likely named after Jacob Tirado, in whose house in Vloenburg the congregation had first met, acquired a house in the Houtgracht in ca. 1614.

<sup>39</sup> Sir William Brereton, *Travels in Holland, the United Provinces, England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1634-1635*, ed. by E. Hawkins (London, 1844), 61, 68.

<sup>40</sup> A number of historians, among others Yoseph Kaplan and Hubert P.H. Nusteling, have argued that the number of Jews in Amsterdam in the early 1630s numbered approximately 1,000, the vast majority of which were Spanish-Portuguese Jews. This number increased to roughly 5,000 souls in 1675, 3,200 of which were Sephardim and 1,800 Ashkenazim. For a recent demographic study, see Hubert P.H. Nusteling's “The Jews in the Republic of the United Provinces: Origin, Numbers and Dispersion,” in *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500-2000)*, eds. Jonathan Israel and Reinier Salverda (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 43-57.

<sup>41</sup> Philip von Zesen, *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: M. W. Doornik, 1664), 272.

unbearable. The size of the “Hoogduitse Gemeenschap,” or High German Community, would increase significantly over the course of the century as Jews, attracted by the growing reputation of Holland as a safe and prosperous place, settled in its urban centers. In contrast to their Spanish and Portuguese brethren, these Ashkenazim were predominantly poor, unacculturated, and from a highly traditional background. They were mostly petty traders who spoke Yiddish and whose exposure to the non-Jewish world – and the willingness to engage with it outside of the realm of commerce – had been minimal. However, the opportunities available in this port city, particularly with respect to religious observance, cultural life, and commercial activity, benefited the Ashkenazim just as much as the Sephardim, although historians generally agree that it was mostly due to the presence of the Spanish-Portuguese Jews that the Ashkenazim were able to share in the city’s growth and well-being. The latter, for instance, participated indirectly by working for enterprises the Sephardim had already established earlier on, such as the tobacco and diamond industry.

That Jews soon established communal institutions such as schools, slaughter houses, and synagogues within close proximity of each other, and thereby began to claim a Jewish space for themselves, is confirmed by Charles Ogier, secretary to the French Ambassador Claude de Mesmes. When the two Frenchmen stopped for a visit in Amsterdam on their way home to Paris in July of 1636, Ogier decided to explore what he referred to as the “Jewish section of the city.” He visited “two synagogues,” although it is not clear from Ogier’s journal which ones. Rachel Wischnitzer suspects that the first synagogue Ogier saw was *Beth Israel*, to which his journal devotes considerable space. He described the large bimah, the ark, the seating arrangements which ran along the



walls, and the screened gallery reserved for female worshipers. Furthermore, he noticed the simple lay-out and the interior's modesty with respect to decoration. He then tells us of his visit to the "alia synagogue" [the "other synagogue], most likely the nearby *Neve Shalom* prayer house, where he had the chance to meet Menasseh ben Israel. Ogier notes in this diary that he had been eager to meet this famous rabbi, but unfortunately did not get to spend much time with him in the synagogue, perhaps, contends Wischnitzer, "because he was annoyed by the presence of some ladies from Utrecht who had engaged the rabbi in conversation."<sup>42</sup> All we really learn from his description of *Neve Shalom* is that the inscription panels featured the motif of "flores et arbores" [flowers and trees]. In 1639, by which time approximately a 1,000 Jews resided in Amsterdam, the three Spanish-Portuguese congregations merged into one community under the name *Talmud Tora* and initiated the construction of a new synagogue, again alongside the Houtgracht. This event marked the beginning of a visible and public presence of Jewish religious prayer houses in the Dutch urban landscape. The elegant building, the façade of which was designed in accordance with current aesthetic tastes, was inaugurated in October of the same year and would serve the community until 1675 (fig. 5). Its Corinthian pilasters, its tall windows decorated with fashionable Dutch shutters, its parapet on the roof, and the fanlight over the balcony door rendered "die große Judenkirche," as von Zesen called it in his guidebook, a product of its time.<sup>43</sup> It is this synagogue that saw the excommunication of both Uriel da Costa (1640) and Baruch Spinoza (1656), as well as the short but intense messianic fervor around Sabbatai Zevi in the 1660s.

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<sup>42</sup> Wischnitzer, 83.

<sup>43</sup> Wischnitzer, 86.

Not until the 1670s, however, did the Joodse Buurt [the Jewish neighborhood] in Amsterdam begin to acquire a permanent place in Dutch cultural and religious life and obtain an international reputation by the construction of the Esnoga and the Great Synagogue. These monumental and easily identifiable synagogues, particularly the Esnoga, became public markers of the prosperity, sense of comfort, and prestige the city's Jewish communities enjoyed during these years. Built opposite of each other on the Houtgracht within the time span of only five years, explains Kaplan, these structures illustrated “better than anything else how well these two communities were accepted in Amsterdam and how much they had become an integral, recognized, and legitimate part of the social and religious panorama of the city.”<sup>44</sup> Their emergence is particularly striking when one considers the modesty and caution with which other religious minorities kept out of the public realm, particularly Dutch Catholics, who worshiped in so-called *schuilkerken*, which translates literally into “concealed churches.” While Catholics, due to strong anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiments, gathered in such private homes as the 1661 *Ons Lieve Heer op Solder* – Our Dear Lord in the Attic – the Jews erected two elaborate and grand structures that were to form, according to historian David P. Cohen Paraira, “the heart of the most imposing synagogue complex in the world.”<sup>45</sup>

A number of factors explain the construction of large synagogues in Amsterdam at this time, the first of which concerns the communities’ rising prosperity. This period

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<sup>44</sup> Yoseph Kaplan, “De Joden in de Republiek tot omstreeks 1750: Religieus, Cultureel en Sociaal Leven,” in *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland*, ed. by J.C.H. Blom et al. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1995), 139.

<sup>45</sup> David P. Cohen Paraira, “A Jewel in the City: The Architectural History of the Portuguese-Jewish Synagogue,” in *The Esnoga: A Monument to Portuguese-Jewish Culture*, ed. by Judith C. E. Belinfante et al. (Amsterdam: D'ARTS, 1991), 44.

was truly a Golden Age, not merely with regard to the Republic's colonial trade and commercial power during most of the seventeenth century, but also with regard to Jewish religious, cultural, and institutional life. It saw the emergence of Jewish schools and printing houses, of poetry and plays by such writers as Daniel Levi de Barrios and Joseph Penso de la Vega, and the Yiddish bi-weekly *Dinstagisje en Frajtagisje Koerant*; a growing industry in diamonds, tobacco, and minting, and the first publication of a Yiddish Bible (1679) and a Jewish newspaper, the *Gazeta de Amsterdam*.<sup>46</sup> That both communities enjoyed a certain level of financial security by the 1670s is reflected, for instance, in the number of Sephardi bank account holders at the Amsterdam Bank, which rose from 89 in 1641 (6 percent of the total number of accounts) to 265 in 1671 (13 percent), an increase that was even more remarkable as the number of gentile bank account holders actually decreased in the late 1660s.<sup>47</sup> This accumulation of capital resulted from the intensification of commercial and financial activities, a process which benefited the community at large as the *imposta* – a tax imposed on the import and export of goods – enriched communal funds. Jews, in short, decided to build on a large scale because they could afford it.

Moreover, the growing number of Jews residing in the city demanded larger houses of worship. Whereas in the 1630s the Sephardi community consisted of about 900 members and the Ashkenazim numbered around 100, in the early 1670s this had multiplied significantly to approximately 3,200 Sephardim and 1,800 Ashkenazim.<sup>48</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> See Mozes Heiman Gans, *Memorbook: History of Dutch Jewry from the Renaissance to 1940* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning n.v., 1971), 145. David de Castro Tartas' *Gazeta de Amsterdam* appeared from 1675 to 1690, and was one of the first periodicals ever published by Jews.

<sup>47</sup> See Jozeph Michman, Hartog Beem, and Dan Michman, eds., *Pinkas: Geschiedenis van de Joodse Gemeenschap in Nederland* (Ede: Kluwer Algemene Boeken, 1985), 25.

<sup>48</sup> Nusteling, 53.

male contingent of these 5,000 Jews, a number that was likely to increase in the years to come, needed to be provided with spacious and respectable synagogues. Most important, however, was the overall feeling of safety from persecution and the desire to proudly display a heritage that in Catholic Spain had been strictly forbidden and concealed. Although not all Jews residing in Amsterdam at this time had come to Holland for religious reasons – if so, then leaving for an already firmly established kehillah such as the one in Venice would have made more sense – many did “return” to Judaism as a result of the Republic’s prevailing intellectual and religious liberties. Constructing grand synagogues gave expression to these sentiments and allowed Jewish worship to be transformed from an activity largely directed at the inside to one that incorporated public representation into its celebration of Judaism. For Ashkenazim, they merely desired the continuation of a Jewish milieu that had structured their lives for generations, of which synagogue building constituted a fundamental dimension. That the relatively liberal Dutch environment and overall well-being of the German-Jewish community allowed for a much more open articulation of Jewish religious traditions only stimulated the desire to do so. In short, giving architectural expression to Jewish religion and culture was thus largely a reflection of and a response to the socio-economic and political conditions in which Jews lived.

On May 1, 1670, after five Ashkenazim had received permission from local authorities to begin the construction of their new synagogue “freely on the public road,”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> David Moses Sluys tells us that in December 1669 permission was requested to “found a new synagogue . . . not hidden in an alley, but free on the public road” by five Jews: Joseph Abrahams (known among his contemporaries as R. Joseph Polak), Nathaniel Cohen, Zadok Salomons, Isack Cohen, and Alexander Barents. See Sluys, *De Oudste Synagogen der Hoogduitsch-Joodsche Gemeente te Amsterdam, 1635-1671* (Amsterdam: Joachimsthal's Stoomdrukkerij, 1921), 17. Sluys's 1924 publication *De Groote Synagoge als Bezienswaardigheid. Beidrage tot de Kennis der Geschiedenis van de Groote Synagoge der Nederl. Israëli. Hoofdsynagoge te Amsterdam*, also elaborates on this event.

the cornerstone of the German-Jewish synagogue was laid (fig. 6). Granted a 16,000 guilder-loan from the city magistrate – almost half of the 33,621 guilders it would cost to finish the project – the community hired a Christian contractor by the name of Elias Bouman (literally “Elias the Builder”), a master mason who would also play an important role in the construction of the Spanish Portuguese synagogue that same year. Daniel Stalpaert, the city architect responsible for Amsterdam’s 1669 “Oosterkerk” (East Church), provided the design: an elegant brick building with a white trim that was, in the words of an early eighteenth-century Dutch observer, “especially worthwhile seeing for those curious admirers who appreciate buildings, and who are determined to observe all of the *most prominent buildings* in Amsterdam.”<sup>50</sup> The structure, which offered 399 seats for men and 368 for women, displayed three rows of Renaissance windows, the lower three of which were straight headed, the middle row was tall and roundheaded, and the upper row was square. The main entrance, placed in a columnar portal, accentuated the tripartite vertical division of the façade, the effect of which was intensified by four narrow pilasters. The building, flanked on one side by the mikveh and on the other by the residence of the caretaker, presented what architectural historian Carol Krinsky called “a picture of stately dignity among the nearby low and narrow gabled houses of the seventeenth century.”<sup>51</sup> Dedicated in March 25, 1671, the Great Synagogue soon required additional accommodations due to the influx of Ashkenazim into the capitol. The

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<sup>50</sup> This anonymous Dutch observer entitled his book, *Beknopte Beschryving van alle de voornaamste Gebouwen der wydvermaarde Koopstad Amsterdam, Cierlyk in 't Koper afgebeeld, inzonderheyd van het Stadhuys, waar by ook gevoegd is, een Verklaaring van het Schilderwerk, boven de groote Zaal ,alles ordentlyk byeen gebragt, ten dienste van de genene die begeerig zijn om de gebouwen der gemelde Stad te bezigtigen* (Amsterdam: Dirk Schouten, 1713).

<sup>51</sup> Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 389.

structure, which today houses the Jewish Historical Museum, was enlarged with the so-called “obbene shul” in 1685, a “dritte shul” in 1700, and a “neie shul” in 1750.<sup>52</sup>

The expansion of the Jewish district reached its zenith with the construction of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in 1671, which was the largest in the world by the time it was dedicated four years later (fig. 7). An impressive 36 x 28 x 19.5 meters in size, the Esnoga was a majestic square structure that towered over the surrounding buildings, dominating the Jewish neighborhood from almost every angle. This sharp contrast between the synagogue and the lower buildings enclosing it was intensified visually by the buttresses, pilasters, and tall, arched windows of the synagogue, which made the building seem even higher and more impressive.<sup>53</sup> To a local Dutch observer the new Spanish-Portuguese synagogue, which accommodated 1227 men and 440 women, constituted a “very graceful building so pleasing to the eye, that it is a delight to look at,”<sup>54</sup> a sentiment shared by contemporary and recent visitors alike. It was also the first known synagogue that included women’s galleries as an organic part of the initial design.<sup>55</sup> The Esnoga, which cost an amazing 186,000 guilders, was built by the before-mentioned Elias Bouman in the same Protestant Baroque style as the Heidereutergasse synagogue of Berlin, the popular aesthetic form of the late 1600s and early 1700s that expressed in classical architectural terms “the forthright character and sobriety of the

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<sup>52</sup> On March 21, 1671, the parnasim of the Ashkenazi community purchased the plot of land adjacent to their new synagogue (which would be inaugurated a few days later) for 800 guilders in order to build a kosher butcher shop, for which they receive permission from the local authorities in 1672. In 1685 a second synagogue, known as the Obbene Shul, is built on top of this structure. Fifteen years later a third synagogue, the Dritte Shul, is built due to a lack of seats for the growing Jewish population.

<sup>53</sup> Paraira in *The Esnoga*, 48.

<sup>54</sup> See *Beknopte Beschrijving van alle de voornaamste Gebouwen*. This volume, unfortunately, lacks page numbers.

<sup>55</sup> See De Breffny, 137. Most women’s sections up to this time were not part of the main hall of worship, and were either tucked away in annexes or basements, or added on in the form of galleries at a later date. The synagogue of Frankfurt is a good example, the drawing of which shows a three-storied women’s annex on the north side.

Dutch Calvinists, with none of the tumultuous, overflowing grandeur of the baroque of the Catholic south.”<sup>56</sup> Built in red-brown brick, its interior and exterior displayed plain geometric and symmetrical patterns in the forms of Tuscan columns, pilasters, and tall square windows. This strict adherence to symmetry was considered an important requirement in the classical tradition, so much so, that the north side of the building was given a door, just like the one on the south side, for the sole reason of creating an aesthetic balance. The fact that this door would be blocked by the bench for the parnasim behind it was of much less concern than a consistently applied symmetrical pattern. This desire for balanced proportions found equal expression in the synagogue’s façade, which was divided by pilasters into a wide central section, with narrower sections on each side. An inscription in gilt Hebrew lettering, taken from Psalm 5, verse 8, and distinctly placed above the stone entrance, read: “In the abundance of Thy loving kindness will I come into Thy house.” The date that accompanies this inscription, the year 1672, suggests that the construction of the Esnoga experienced significant delays as it was inaugurated three years later on August 2, 1675.<sup>57</sup>

The restrained classical style, which found visual expression in the design of the Town Hall on the Dam square (1665), the already mentioned Oosterkerk (1669-1671), and the Marine Arsenal (1655-1656), was closely connected to the newly acquired wealth of the ruling elites.<sup>58</sup> Its monumentality, the sparing use of decoration, and the harmony among the architectural elements signaled prestige and an elegant, respectable lifestyle. However, building the Esnoga in this architectural tradition afforded the Spanish-

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<sup>56</sup> De Breffny, 136.

<sup>57</sup> 1672 was the year the Esnoga was supposed to be ready, but a destructive storm and the increasing tensions the city experienced as a result of the international conflict between France and England, halted construction work.

<sup>58</sup> Paraira in *The Esnoga*, 54 - 55.

Portuguese community not merely an opportunity to communicate visually to the public its participation in and loyalty to Dutch economic and cultural progress. It simultaneously allowed for the incorporation of historical elements. Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem proved to be a particular source of inspiration, the design of which found resonance in the synagogue's representation.<sup>59</sup> While conforming to contemporary aesthetic taste, the Esnoga integrated into its design biblical components that produced not simply a classicist building, but an identifiably Jewish structure built in the classicist tradition. The widespread attention the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue received from gentiles and Jews alike since its inauguration in 1675 can be partially explained by this appealing blend of a highly popular architectural form with Jewish connotations.

By the mid-1670s Amsterdam's Joodse Buurt was comprised of two grand synagogues (fig. 8), offices for the parnasim, the communities' slaughterhouses, residences for the rabbis, and a number of Jewish schools, gambling- and coffee houses, and printing facilities, all of which, contends historian Jozeph Michman, "gave the neighborhood the quality of a Jewish center not seen anywhere else in Europe at this time."<sup>60</sup> The creation of this network of social, religious, and cultural organizations in which Jews socialized daily rendered it a space that asserted and cultivated a form of Jewish self-identification. Indeed, the semiological landscape that gave visual expression to this budding network constantly reminded Jews of their ethnic and religious heritage,

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<sup>59</sup> The Sephardic Rabbi Jacob Jehuda Leon had reconstructed a meticulously detailed model of Solomon's Temple in the 1640s, which was on display in his home in Amsterdam. According to historian Adam Sutcliffe, viewing the wooden model at Leon's home became a tourist attraction in the mid-seventeenth century, one that capitalized on Protestant interest in Judaica. The outwardly slanted buttresses on the sides of the reconstructed Temple were repeated in the design of the Esnog, suggesting the model directly influenced the outcome of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue. See Adam Sutcliffe, "Identity, Space and Intercultural Contact in the Urban Entrepôt: The Sephardic Bounding of Community in Early Modern Amsterdam and London," in *Jews and Port Cities 1590-1990: Commerce, Community and Cosmopolitanism*, edited by David Cesarani and Gemma Romain (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 97.

<sup>60</sup> Michman in *Pinkas*, 53.



particularly with regard to the biblical affiliations inherent in the Esnoga, and affirmed a strong affiliation with Judaism. The Jewish district thus instilled the perception – among Jews and non-Jews alike – that Jews formed a distinct group among the city’s cosmopolitan population. Furthermore, the Joodse Buurt reflected the transition from an observance that had mostly taken place in the private sphere of upper rooms, warehouses, or inconspicuous synagogues to one openly practiced in the public realm. The privacy in which Jews had practiced their religion had gradually unveiled itself to the external viewer who could now behold the freedom of public worship.

The construction of very visible Jewish prayer houses on prominent sites extended an invitation to “outsiders” to come and observe the fruits of religious freedom. And gentiles, in increasing numbers, did. Sightseeing in the Jewish neighborhood became part of the tourist agenda while visiting Amsterdam. Jewish communal leaders – Sephardim much more than the Ashkenazim – favored this growing interest in the synagogue, an institution that became, according to Ismar Schorsch, “the most important public arena for the expression of Jewish identity.”<sup>61</sup> They encouraged gentiles to access its domain by attempting to foster an elegant and respectful image of the congregation. Yosef Kaplan even found a number of special regulations introduced as early as the late 1640s intended to create a sense of earnestness and decorum that would please Christian guests:

In contrast to the policy of segregation that characterized many Jewish communities in Europe, the Portuguese community of Amsterdam showed great openness toward Christian visitors and even stated in a special regulation adopted in September 1649 that ‘the gentlemen who sit behind the *tebah* [reader’s platform] will be permitted to offer a seat to any man [who might visit the synagogue] without disturbing the congregation of worshippers.’ Since this regulation had previously mentioned that ‘no man shall rise from his seat in order to greet *goyim* [sic] without permission of their lordship of the Mahamad,’ we may conclude that its intention was to permit

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<sup>61</sup> See Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 2.

non-Jewish visitors to sit in the synagogue, on condition that this was arranged in an orderly manner, by having the worshippers behind the *tebah* function as ushers when necessary, as in a theatre!<sup>62</sup>

By making visitors feel welcome, Jews could personally demonstrate their cultured behavior and good taste, thereby inviting curious Christians to rethink the validity of traditional stereotypes. Replacing “improper” codes of conduct with ones gentiles could recognize and appreciate thus diminished the possibility of rejection. Taking pinches of snuff on the Sabbath thus became inappropriate as such behavior aroused “great reproach not only among the members of our nation but also among the *goyim* who are present in the place, who whisper about these things and others which constitute a desecration of [the name of] heaven.” At the end of the seventeenth century the act of leaving one’s seat during the service, too, was considered improper as it “arouses great reproach among the strangers.”<sup>63</sup> These communal regulations suggest not only that curious Christians visited these Jewish religious spaces; they also imply that Sephardim took great pains to convince them of their moral behavior and “worthiness” by presenting an orderly and dignified Jewish service. The British travel writer Thomas Nugent, at least, was convinced. Visiting Amsterdam in the 1740s, he spent his Saturday morning attending Shabbat services and was quite impressed: “The Jewish synagogue . . . is well worth being seen by the curious traveller; which pleasure he may have every Saturday. One may understand the Jewish rites and ceremonies better by seeing a synagogue, and being present in time of worship, than by the tedious dry study of all the books in the world: the method of acquiring knowledge by the eye, is easy and pleasant. The Jews, in their

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<sup>62</sup> Kaplan, “*Gente Política*,” in *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Kaplan, 28.

synagogues, are civil enough to strangers.”<sup>64</sup> By observing Jews within their own domain – quite a pleasurable experience according to Nugent – one might actually learn something.

As long as Jews kept the public display of Judaism within the boundaries of the Jewish district, they were not considered a threat to the established order. “All kinds of sentiments are tolerated in Amsterdam,” contended the Dutch author Casper Commelin in his 1694 *Beschryvinge van Amsterdam* (Descriptions of Amsterdam), “and no one is forced to abandon his persuasions, be it they remain quiet and don’t cause any public disputes, nor find their way in any annoying literature.”<sup>65</sup> This meant that “when street peddlers . . . sell their merchandise within the vicinity of the churches, the burgomasters [would] contact the parnasim to have the situation improved, for as long as it lasts.”<sup>66</sup> Trying to keep potential tensions between Christians and Jews to a minimum, the more mercantilist-minded city authorities granted Jews an unusual number of privileges, on the condition that they would not “provoke” the Christian population. Indeed, local officials gladly accepted the communities’ self-organization and self-sufficiency, reassured that a powerful Jewish leadership, whose scope was defined by communal concerns such as synagogue worship, education, charity, and censorship, “could keep its subjects restrained and disciplined.”<sup>67</sup> Everybody knew and was allowed to know that this part of the city was the domain of the local Jewish community where they could freely worship, build, and sip coffee, be it within certain physical parameters. That the construction of

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Nugent, *The Grand Tour*, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Casper Commelin, *Beschryvinge van Amsterdam, Zynde een Naukeurige Verhandeling van desselfs eerste Oorspronk uyt den Huyse der Heeren van Amsterl en Amstellant, haar Vergrootingen, Rykdom, en Wyze van Regeeringe, tot den Jare 1691* (Amsterdam: Aart Dirksz. Oossaan, 1694), 236.

<sup>66</sup> D. M. Sluys, *Beelden uit het Leven der Hoogduitsch-Joodsche Gemeente te Amsterdam in the Begin der 18e Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger, 1925), 7.

<sup>67</sup> Sluys, 7.

monumental synagogues in the early 1670s occurred without considerable conflict should therefore come as no surprise, as it took place within the Jews' own locality and did not pose a threat to the preeminence of Christian churches nor to the Protestant status quo.

However, there are many signs that these communal boundaries were becoming increasingly blurred over the course of the seventeenth century. A number of Jews who had gained significant wealth and influence in the non-Jewish world began to take up residence in gentile upper-class neighborhoods. Manúel Baron de Belmonte, for instance, a powerful Sephardi Jew locally known as Isaac Nuñes, moved to the aristocratic Herengracht at a considerable distance from the Joodse Buurt.<sup>68</sup> As living in the Jewish district had always been voluntary, there was no obstruction to moving into Christian residential areas. Moreover, the “for as long as it lasts” comment in the earlier quote suggests that the disciplinary actions of the parnasim to limit the proximity of peddlers to churches had only a temporary effect. The absence of serious consequences might have encouraged the Jewish peddler to roam freely through the city, where he interacted with the locals. Skilled or learned Jews, too, began to venture into occupational realms traditionally closed to them, thereby increasing their visibility and contact with the non-Jewish world. While the majority of guilds did not accept Jews, the latter did receive permission to enter those public commercial domains in which they did not compete with Christians, such as the brokers', physicians', surgeons', apothecaries', and book dealers' guild.<sup>69</sup> Between 1655 and 1685, for instance, eleven Sephardim from Amsterdam

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<sup>68</sup> Mozes Heiman Gans, *Memorbook: History of Dutch Jewry from the Renaissance to 1940* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning n. v., 1971), 117. Manúel Baron de Belmonte was also known as Isaac Nuñes

<sup>69</sup> City officials did exclude Jews from other guilds, mainly because of their own interest in keeping them from spreading their political and economic sphere of influence. However, Daniel Swetschinski argues that "guild restrictions hardly ever affected the most important spheres of the economic life of Amsterdam's Jews. Where they did, the restrictions were lifted or modified. The attitudes of the guilds was formed more by fear of competition than by Church-inspired anti-Jewish sentiments, and their generally discriminatory

received a doctorate in medicine from the University of Leiden, a number that increased in the following decades.<sup>70</sup> Even in the realm of “publick Employment,” as one contemporary British traveler called it, a certain flexibility was permissible. Whereas one visitor reported in 1699 that “wer ein öffentliches Amt haben will, der muß ein Reformirter sein,” a British account observed that exceptions were not uncommon: “[N]one but Calvinists must aspire to publick Employments; thô several have attain’d thereto, who have been of contrary Opinions; but that was either by Inadvertency, or else because they were well satisfy’d in the abilities of the Persons.”<sup>71</sup> Whereas this observer does not specifically refer to Jews, he does imply that the boundaries between Calvinists and non-Calvinists were at the very least not strictly enforced.

The realm of theater, too, suggests Jews increasingly moved into Dutch public space as increasing numbers attended plays performed in the city theaters. When around the turn of the century a small group of Sephardim requested permission from the local authorities to perform Spanish-language plays in the Amsterdam theater on Wednesday evenings, their request was denied not because of anti-Jewish sentiments, but because this meant Jewish visitors would stop coming to theaters on other days of the week.<sup>72</sup> Around the turn of the century Jews were thus eager producers as well as consumers of culture in and outside the parameters of their own neighborhood. It is this careful entry into Dutch

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stance affected non-native Christians as well as Jews, though admittedly less radical." See Daniel M. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000), 21-22.

<sup>70</sup> Kaplan, “De Joden in de Republiek tot omstreeks 1750: Religieus, Cultureel en Sociaal Leven,” in *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland*, 156.

<sup>71</sup> *A New Description of Holland, and the Rest of the United Provinces in General: Containing Their Government, Laws, Religion, Policy, and Strength; Their Customs, Manners, and Riches; Their Trade to the Indies, etc. Their Fishery and Bank, with a Particular Account of Amsterdam, Hague, Rotterdam, and the other Principal Cities of Holland* (London: Printed for H. Rhodes, at the Star, the corner of Bride-Lane, in Fleet Street, 1701), 50.

<sup>72</sup> Kaplan, 159.

cultural and economic affairs and the clear signs that Jews were beginning to feel at home in this small seafaring nation, a process visually embodied in the Esnoga and the Great Synagogue, that oftentimes bothered foreign travelers. While they admired the buildings themselves as architectural gems, they opposed their representation, i.e., the prosperity of Amsterdam Jews (Sephardim as well as Ashkenazim) and their participation in the Republic's economic and cultural life.

The experience of the Jewish community in London shows a not dissimilar pattern, although its establishment occurred somewhat later than in Amsterdam and on a more modest scale. England, which had expelled its Jews in 1290, had equally lacked an organized Jewish community for centuries. While small numbers of Jews had dwelled in London before expulsion – a street named Old Jewry in the City of London is still a silent reminder of this – and while small numbers of conversos resided there in the early seventeenth century, it was not until 1656 that Jewish settlement was again permitted. The negotiations between Menasseh ben Israel and Oliver Cromwell led to an increase in Spanish-Portuguese merchant families in the capital. Some of these Sephardim came from Amsterdam. Heavily involved in trade, their livelihood in the Dutch Republic was threatened by England's measures to cripple its rival's leading position on the economic market. By moving to London, these Sephardim could protect their sources of revenue and expand their trading networks as well. They settled in the easternmost part of the City of London.

This small number of Jews acquired a twenty-one-year lease of a house in Creechurch Lane in December 1656, in which they established a small synagogue on the

upper floor.<sup>73</sup> John Greenhalgh, we may recall, visited this location six years later. Hidden behind “three doors, one beyond another,” it was the first officially acknowledged synagogue in London since the thirteenth century – one designed according to Sephardi traditions, with benches placed in rows parallel to the north and south walls, the walnut Ark at the east end, and a women’s section in an adjoining room with a narrow lattice allowing them to hear the service. Samuel Pepys, whose diary offers invaluable descriptions of daily life in seventeenth century England, visited the synagogue on October 14, 1663:

After dinner my wife and I [went] to the Jewish Synagogue – where the men and boys in their Vayles, and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press, to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their veils do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party doth kiss his veil. Their service [is held] all in a singing way, and in Hebrew; And anon their Laws, that they take out of the press, is carried by several men, four or five, several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another, or whether it is that everyone desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell. Thus they carried [it] round, round about the room while such a service is singing. And in the end they had a prayer for the King, which they pronounced his name in Portugal; but the prayer, like the rest, in Hebrew.<sup>74</sup>

Pepys must not have been particularly struck by the synagogue itself; he does not say much about its interior design. For Pepys there were, most likely, not too many aesthetic surprises; it was a small room appropriately decorated for a religious service. It was the religious rituals taking place that drew his attention which, similarly to Greenhalgh, he finds “absurd.”

The Creechurch Lane synagogue was enlarged in 1674 as a result of the growing Jewish presence in London. The two separate seating areas for male and female

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<sup>73</sup> The owner of the Creechurch Lane building was James Whitbey, who granted a lease to the Sephardim until July 1657, when he transferred his property rights to the Parish of St. Catherine Creechurch. For the next decades this Christian church was the landlord of the synagogue. The Sephardim rented the whole building but only used the upper floor for religious services. The ground floor was most likely used for the rabbi’s living quarters, and a smaller back room served as the women’s prayer chamber. See Wischnitzer, 100.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Latham, *The Shorter Pepys* (London: Bell & Human Limited, 1985).

worshippers were united into one large prayer room and could accommodate close to two hundred people. The attic was converted into a women's gallery supported, writes Wischnitzer, by an arcade with gilded Doric columns. Its interior attested to the economic comfort of the community; the bimah and ark were lit by two silver candelabras, of which two more would be added during the High Holidays. In 1684, writes Lionel D. Barnett, "a great lamp with eight arms" of silver weighing nearly twenty-five pounds was purchased, complementing the silver finials, *yad* and Torah-crown.<sup>75</sup> The London Sephardim, however, exchanged this upper room for new accommodations in Plough Yard, Bevis Marks, in 1701. The Bevis Marks synagogue, built by the Quaker master-builder Joseph Avis, emerged "near the south-east corner between Heneage-lane and Bury-street . . . a handsome, large and commodious brick building, which is supported and frequented only by the sect of the Pharisees."<sup>76</sup> It was a charming two-storied building, approximately 80 x 50 feet, with a red brick exterior and with white stone trimmings. The portal was decorated with a hooded arch and surrounded by five round-headed windows. Its large windows were an indication not only of the community's sense of safety, but also of its prosperity. The governmental tax on windows, first imposed in 1696, increased with the number and size of windows in each building. The Sephardim must have been confident they could afford to install and maintain large windows to illuminate their prayer hall. The building's interior revealed an intimate space, with the wooden ark on the eastern wall, the *tebah* or bimah toward the western aisle, and galleries with latticed trelliswork along three sides of the room. William Maitland, who visited the

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<sup>75</sup> Lionel David Barnett, *El libro de los Acuerdos: Being the Records and Accounts of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of London from 1663 to 1681* (Oxford: The University Press, 1931).

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, *A new and compleat history of the cities of London and Westminster, the borough of Southwark, and parts adjacent; from the earliest accounts, to the beginning of the year 1770 . . .* (London: 1769), 451.



synagogue in the 1740s, reported that “there are seven great branched candlesticks of brass hanging down from the top, and many other places for candles and lamps,” which gave the building a warm atmosphere. Twelve Tuscan columns supported the women’s galleries, under which wooden benches were placed for male worshipers. Avis, who had worked on the Merchant Taylors’ Hall and on St. Bride’s in Fleet Street, had modeled the Bevis Marks synagogue after the Amsterdam Esnoga,<sup>77</sup> using a similar sedate Baroque style, but he had left room for contemporary English influences. The wood carvings of the Ark and the spindle-shaped banisters, for instance, were typical of the period and resembled the decorative motifs of late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century English churches.<sup>78</sup> Bevis Marks, then, combined features of the Esnoga with contemporary church design, a popular blend that would again be employed with the construction of the Great Synagogue.

The London Sephardim were soon joined by their Ashkenazi co-religionists, some of whom worshipped in Creechurch Lane before the establishment of their own Ashkenazi synagogue in 1690. Their numbers increased after the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689, which brought Holland and England under one rule and which facilitated the coming and going of Jewish merchants. Immigration to London – Jews and non-Jews from Amsterdam as well as from other places on the European continent – grew significantly in the following decades and rendered the need for an Ashkenazi synagogue

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<sup>77</sup> Krinsky observes that the Ark in the Bevis Marks synagogue resembles that of the Esnoga: “[it] is a multipart two-storey chest with columns dividing the lower storey and flanking the raised portion of the upper storey, where gilt-lettered Ten Commandments are displayed. The ark at Amsterdam, however, looks more like a cabinet, while that of London looks like a late-Renaissance church façade because its two storeys are connected by scrolls.” Krinsky, 413. See also R. Barnett, *The Synagogue of Bevis Marks* (London: 1960).

<sup>78</sup> Wischnitzer notes that “the Ark resembles the wooden reredos of the late seventeenth-century St. Vedast ‘Church Within’ at Farrington [and that] the spindles of the banister are similar to the communion rail of St. Margaret Lothbury, another late seventeenth-century house of worship.” Wischnitzer, p. 104. The description of the Bevis Marks synagogue given here are also from her account.

increasingly apparent. Around 1690, the Ashkenazim set up an independent congregation in rented quarters in Duke's Place, Aldgate, less than three hundred yards away from Bevis Marks. On September 18, 1722 – on the eve of the New Year of 5483 and at the same location – a new synagogue was dedicated. We have very little architectural information of the Great Synagogue before its reconstruction in 1790. We do know that it stood on Corporation of London land and that it was erected under the auspices of Moses Hart, a successful stock and commodity broker who had obtained the building lease in 1716 and who paid £2,000 for its construction. A drawing for the lease reveals that it was a nearly square building, roughly 64 by 60 feet, adjoining Shoemaker's Row. The lease, explains Cecil Roth, stipulated that four hundred pounds was to be spent on the property, an amount which Hart exceeded five-fold by the time of its inauguration. Hart had, over a period of five years, purchased various properties at Duke's Place and had persuaded the tenants to search for other residences in return for a financial contribution. Once he owned enough property around the existing quarters, Hart funded the construction of a new synagogue, "no longer a dwelling house adapted for the purpose," writes Roth, "but a building properly designed and expressly erected to meet the requirements of Jewish worship."<sup>79</sup>

Within a few hundred yards of Duke's Place a third synagogue emerged, namely the Hambro synagogue, founded by the well-to-do German-Jewish immigrant Mordecai (or Marcus) Moses. It was the result of an internal conflict in the Ashkenazi community and the first attempt to establish a "secessionist" synagogue. The small congregation had met at its founder's house in Magpye Alley, Fenchurch Street, since the early 1700s, but in 1725, despite intense protest from Moses Hart, they were able to erect a small

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<sup>79</sup> Cecil Roth, *The Great Synagogue, London, 1690-1940* (London: Edward Goldston & Son, 1950), 47-50.

synagogue in the garden attached to Marcus Moses' house. A photograph taken before its 1892 demolition shows a smaller but similar design to Bevis Marks, although its ritual and liturgical practices were no doubt comparable to those of the Great Synagogue.<sup>80</sup> Paul Lindsay suggests that its Sephardic design might have been related to the congregation's antipathy to the Great Synagogue, but this remains guess-work.<sup>81</sup> The Hambro community would reconcile with the Great Synagogue in 1750.

The situation in London was not unlike that of Amsterdam: the Sephardic Bevis Marks, the new Ashkenazi Great Synagogue, and the Hambro synagogue stood in close proximity of each other, defining the eastern part of the City as the center of Jewish settlement. The Great Synagogue also resembled the Spanish-Portuguese model, but was, according to D'Blossiers Tovey in his *Anglia Judaica* of 1738 "not half so big."<sup>82</sup> However, the London synagogues did not really become tourist attractions in the first half of the eighteenth century in the way the Amsterdam synagogues had fifty years earlier, in part because they simply were not of the same magnitude and splendor. After all, they needed to accommodate only a small community – a few thousand Jews lived in England in the early 1700s, most of them in London. Moreover, they were not built on major thoroughfares as were the ones in the Dutch capital. The Sephardic house of worship was built in a discreet lane in Plough Yard – the City as a whole consisted largely of small streets, squares, and courts. Bevis Marks thus lacked the visibility and imposing presence of the Amsterdam Esnoga and the Great Synagogue, and therefore received mostly

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<sup>80</sup> Clarence Epstein, "Compromising Traditions in Eighteenth-Century London: The Architecture of the Great Synagogue, Duke's Place," in Sharman Kadish's *Building Jerusalem: Jewish Architecture in Britain* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 80. The name Hambro originated from the congregation's adoption of the Hamburg *minhag* [rituals].

<sup>81</sup> Paul Lindsay, *The Synagogues of London* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1993), 45.

<sup>82</sup> See Wischnitzer, 166.

lukewarm responses. William Maitland, who gives a very detailed account of the city in *The History and Survey of London from its Foundation to the Present Time*, alludes to the rather unspectacular presence of both structures in the city's urban landscape:

[T]he chief, but narrow Entrance into *Duke's-place*, which is large, and for the most Part inhabited by *Jews* . . . out of *Duke's-place-court* is a Street which leadeth to another, and both formerly called *Duke's-place*, now *King's-street*. In this Place, in a larger upper Room, was the old *Jews Synagogue*. From this Part is *Heneage-lane*, which falls into *Bevis-marks*, close by the *Portuguese Jews Synagogue*, and then into *Camomile-street*, which runs along by the Wall, as far as *St. Mary-axe*: But neither this nor *Bevis-marks* are Places of great Account.<sup>83</sup>

Maitland, who gives a painfully dry description of London's streets and alleys, was unimpressed. So was contemporary traveler Henri Misson, who wondered why he even brought up the subject "for 'tis hardly worth relating."<sup>84</sup> However, while the London synagogues did not have the same presence as the ones in Amsterdam, they did attest to the dramatic improvement of sites of Jewish worship, showing, however modestly, the growing confidence and prosperity of the community. The same can be said about the Heidereuterstraße synagogue in Berlin. In all three cities, then, the early modern period brought significant improvements. For Jewish communities who could afford it and who were granted permission, synagogues became dignified buildings with elegant facades, better lighting, and more comfortable seating arrangements. The latter affected women in particular. Their seats were no longer considered inconvenient obstacles best hidden in dark and stuffy rooms; they became an integrated part of the overall design. These north European synagogues reflected urban Jews' improved socio-economic status, although in all cases – in Germany in particular – this status was still highly dependent on the goodwill of the Christian city authorities and therefore at all times conditional.

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<sup>83</sup> William Maitland, *The history and survey of London from its foundation to the present time. In two volumes* . . . Vol. II (London: printed for T. Osborne, 1760), 777.

<sup>84</sup> Henri Misson, *M. Misson's memoirs and observations in his travels over England; With some account of Scotland and Ireland. Dispos'd in alphabetical order. Written originally in French* . . . / (London: printed for D. Browne, A. Bell, J. Darby, A. Bettesworth, J. Pemberton, 1719), 144.

As was the case in Berlin and Amsterdam, improved conditions in London brought forth a desire to enhance decorum during synagogue services. Ashkenazi worshipers were admonished and fined for chewing tobacco in the synagogue and for throwing sweet-meats [little cakes] on a bridegroom on the Sabbath after the wedding. Some rules of decorum posed serious problem, such as the fashionable but sizeable attire for women which, in the mid-1700s, took up a considerable amount of space. To ensure that all ladies could be seated properly during the High Holidays, the Mahamad decided in 1755 that only those ladies without a hoop would be admitted.

These questions concerning decorum grew out of Jews' own desire to become respectable members of the London community, but many of the cultural codes determining what was respectable or not were imposed by the Anglo-Jewish gentility. If Jews were to become accepted members of society, they needed to make certain alterations and accommodate to England's prevailing religious standards. They had to prevent, to use Greenhalgh's words once again, "the frightening of a novice" during their services. John Wesley's experience in the mid-eighteenth century shows that some of these reforms had the desired effect. Wesley, who visited the Great Synagogue to hear the voice of Meir ben Judah – also known as Meyer or Michael Leoni – wrote in his journal that he "never before saw a Jewish congregation behave so decently."<sup>85</sup> To be perceived by gentiles as decent, respectable members of society was an objective shared by Jews in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London alike, and constructing dignified prayer houses certainly aided in this endeavor.

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<sup>85</sup> John Wesley (1703-1791), *The Journal of John Wesley*, edited by Nora Ratcliff (London: Nelson, 1940). The journal entry is dated February 23, 1769.

## Gentile Responses

Most travelers choose their destinations because there is an anticipation of pleasure, one that is constructed and sustained through such practices as reading literature, conversing with friends, or looking at visual imagery. During the eighteenth century, the growing supply of travel guides enhanced this anticipation and allowed readers to commence their engagement with these cities before the actual journey had begun. “I have now made all my preparations for this journey,” wrote Karl Phillip Moritz in the 1780s. “I have an accurate map of England in my pocket, together with an excellent guide-book lent to me by Mr. Pointer, the English merchant to whom I was recommended from Hamburg, and entitled: *A New and accurate Description of all the direct and principal Cross-roads in Great Britain*. This book I hope will serve me well in my wanderings.”<sup>86</sup> Moritz, as so many other travelers of his time, left for London well prepared.

Many tourists ventured into Jewish neighborhoods once they arrived at their destinations, either to see the synagogues they had heard so much about – which was the case for many foreign visitors to Amsterdam – or to observe at first-hand the life-styles of “exotic” strangers. Some accidentally stumbled into streets mainly occupied with Jews; others just visited to kill time. The observations that these late seventeenth and eighteenth-century travelers made of Jewish religious edifices were, as pointed out early in this chapter, influenced by the context in which their interaction with the buildings took place. With respect to Amsterdam this meant a relatively liberal religious and multi-ethnic Dutch milieu that permitted Jews a greater number of privileges than the majority

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<sup>86</sup> Karl Phillip Moritz, *Travels, Chiefly on Foot, Through Several Parts of England, in 1782. Described in Letters to a Friend, By Charles P. Moritz, A Literary Gentleman of Berlin. Translated From the German, By A Lady* (London: printed for G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), 79.

of foreign visitors were used to. London, too, granted Jews a level of security – or should we say indifference – that was unknown to most central Europeans, Jews and gentiles alike. Many were therefore baffled because the status of Dutch and Anglo Jews as a generally tolerated religious and ethnic minority was to them both foreign and incomprehensible. On the other hand, Dutch and British gentiles gazing at German synagogues, particularly those belonging to unprotected Jews, generally could not hide their dismay when confronted with a situation that appeared to be quite the opposite of what they had come to consider “normal.”<sup>87</sup>

This element of surprise is, according to Lindsay Jones, a fundamental component in the human experience of architecture as its interpretation and meaning emerges out of the “tension between on the one hand a buildings’ conformity to a collectively shared schema, and on the other hand its undermining of habits of perception.”<sup>88</sup> Without an element of surprise as a result of deviation, architecture remains silent and unproductive, and thereby fails to invite the observer to reflect on established norms and traditions: “[In] the feeling of astonishment,” wrote the Italian tourist Edmondo de Amicis, “one finds cause for reflection.”<sup>89</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is best known for his theoretical explorations in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), made a similar point when he spoke of a “double mediation,”<sup>90</sup> referring to the juxtaposition of paired components required for architectural projects to work successfully, namely those of order and variation, conventionality and innovation, familiarity and deviation, predictability and surprise. The

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<sup>87</sup> Most travelers actually do not visit Berlin in the early 1700s, but are attracted instead to such places as Frankfurt, Cologne, and Hannover. When they do include Berlin in their travel plans, they seldom mention the Jewish synagogue. Gentile responses to the *Heidereuterstraße* synagogue are therefore sparse.

<sup>88</sup> Jones, 67.

<sup>89</sup> Edmondo de Amicis, *Holland and its People*. Translated from the Italian by Caroline Tilton (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1972 [1880]), 290.

<sup>90</sup> See Jones, 71.

conventionality of the Esnoga, Bevis Marks, the Great Synagogue, and the Heidereuterstraße synagogue is located in their very form; they were built in a popular aesthetic style and fit into a familiar north European cultural tradition, one that virtually every well-to-do tourist could recognize and identify with. However, the association of these structures' elegance and public presence with *Jews* challenged many of the observers' expectations and undermined their value system. In the eyes of many foreign travelers these components did or should not match, thereby generating a sense of perplexity that was not infrequently translated into a confirmation of long-held Jewish stereotypes.

The more willing travelers were to engage in a dialogue with the built form and to question the juxtaposition between individual expectation and actuality, the more revealing their responses are. Three different types of reactions to synagogues emerge in reading contemporary travel literature, the first of which reveals the lack of any kind of willingness to deal with the Jewish presence in the city. Whereas Jewish synagogues, particularly those in Mokum, had become sites on the tourist map of Europe by the end of the seventeenth century, a number of travelogues do not mention them at all or describe them briefly. Maximilien Misson reports in his 1699 *New Voyage to Italy: With Curious Observations on several other Countries* that "Amsterdam is without doubt one of the most beautiful, admirable, and important Cities in the World . . . the great Magazine of Europe," but leaves out any mention of the city's Jews. Misson, who finds all Dutch cities "of a sparkling Beauty," refers to Dutch Jews only once in a description of Frankfurt. In this German city "there are a great number of Jews, but they are as beggarly



as those of Amsterdam are rich.”<sup>91</sup> William Bromley, too, skips over the new synagogues in his elaborate travelogue *Several Years Travels . . . Performed by a Gentleman*. He describes Amsterdam’s City Hall as “the first to be taken notice of, as being the most magnificent Structure of its kind in Europe” and refers to “other publick buildings,”<sup>92</sup> but the Jewish neighborhood was clearly not on his busy itinerary. The same was true for Johann Peter Willebrandt, who took the time to warn his readers of the *Judengesindel* or Jewish riff-raff in Frankfurt, but he did not mention Jews or their synagogue when visiting Berlin.<sup>93</sup> Both are similarly absent in *A brief description of the cities of London and Westminster, the public buildings, palaces, gardens, squares, &c.*, as well as in the *Ambulator: Or, a Pocket Companion in a Tour Round London . . . a Concise Description of the Metropolis*. This last travel guide, published in the late 1700s, was over three hundred pages thick, but mentions the city’s synagogues just once: “There are likewise a great number of chapels for the established church, foreign protestant churches, Roman Catholic chapels, meeting for the dissenters of all persuasions, and three synagogues for the Jews.”<sup>94</sup> Synagogues were obviously not part of his “concise description.”

The absence of synagogue references in some of the travel literature does, of course, not necessarily mean that the authors refused to go and see Jewish houses of

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<sup>91</sup> Maximilien Misson, *A New Voyage to Italy: With Curious Observations on Several Other Countries, as, Germany, Switzerland, Savoy, Geneva, Flanders, and Holland . . . Done out of French* (London: 1699), 22, 54.

<sup>92</sup> William Bromley, *Several Years Travels through Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Provinces. Performed by a Gentleman* (London: Printed for A. Roper, at the Black Boy, R. Basset at the Mitre in Fleet-Street, and W. Turner at Lincolns, Inn Back Gate, 1702), 275.

<sup>93</sup> Joh. Peter Willebrandt, *Historische Berichte und practische Anmerkungen auf Reisen in Deutschland und andern Ländern* (Leipzig: Verlag der Heinsiußischen Buchhandlung, 1769), 228. Willebrandt did mention the Jews of Amsterdam, which I will elaborate on below.

<sup>94</sup> *Ambulator: or, a pocket companion in a tour round London, within the circuit of twenty five miles: describing whatever is most remarkable for Antiquity, Grandeur, Elegance, or Rural Beauty: including new catalogues of pictures, and illustrated by historical and biographical observations: to which are prefixed a Concise Description of the Metropolis, and a map of the country described* (London: printed for Jane Bew, 1793), 6.

worship, or that they harbored anti-Jewish sentiments; perhaps synagogues were not a priority on a long list of sites to see in a relatively short period of time. Moreover, brief descriptions of Jewish religious structures were oftentimes accompanied by equally brief paragraphs on Lutheran, Catholic, Arminian, or Quaker houses of worship, suggesting that the purpose of writing their particular travelogue was not to analyze these urban sites, but to merely report them in order to convey to the reader the impressive array of sites within the city center the author had observed. However, the fact that other travelers around this time talk about the “famous synagogues” in Amsterdam does suggest the latter were most likely highly popular tourist sites and that a conscious decision was made not to go see or write about them, or to only mention them in passing. The London synagogues, although less prominent, were similarly listed as tourist sites – the 1726 *New Guide to London, or Directions to Strangers*, for instance, mentions both the Bevis Marks and Great Synagogue – but a number of travelogues remain conspicuously silent on these buildings and on the Jews who convene in them. It is hard to imagine that there was no resentment or animus at all among this first group as they selected their travel plans.

A second group of responses includes an elaborate and overall positive description of the synagogues, but are followed by a rather quick and firm rejection of the larger implications of these buildings. Most of these visitors came from France and Germany. They wandered into the City or into Mokum’s Joodse Buurt, observed both the exterior and interior of its religious structures, and occasionally attended services. Many of them appreciated the buildings’ grandeur but were not willing to accept their message: that non-Christians could enjoy some of the same privileges – freedom of conscience,

ownership of land, a sense of security – as Christians. In fact, many saw the Esnoga, the Great Synagogues, and Bevis Marks as confirmations of their own preconceived notions of Jews, whether with respect to Jewish malevolence or domination. These visitors were thus drawn to the synagogues of London and Amsterdam, but refused to interpret them as representations of progress toward a greater tolerance and instead translated them as “proof” for traditional Jewish stereotypes.

This is particularly evident in a recurring story in late-seventeenth century travel literature which explained the construction of the Amsterdam Esnoga as an act of conspiracy against the Dutch authorities; rich and powerful Jews were secretly building a large fortress, disguised as a synagogue, in order to take over the city. It recounted how local officials expressed growing concerns during the construction process as the building increasingly resembled an intimidating fortress rather than a house of worship. The outwardly slanting buttresses, similar to the design of Solomon’s Temple, particularly intensified this speculation (fig. 9). As a result of this “threat,” the story went, the local authorities put a stop to the project by demanding the Jewish community built a roof on the unfinished structure. The anonymous French traveler B. F., whose elaborate travel account *Voyages Historiques de l’Europe* was published in Paris in the late 1690s and translated into English and German in the following decade, told his readers:

When you have visited the Arsenals, if you have not a mind to keep along by the Port, you must cross the Jews Quarter, which would be one of the most Beautiful in the City, were those Disciples of Moses as neat as the Hollanders. There are two Synagogues, one for the Greek and German Jews, another for the Portuguese. This is much the fairer, being built in a great Square, cover’d with a Duomo, and resembles rather a Citadel than a Jewish Temple; So that when the Jews built it so high, and so thick, the Magistracy began to grow jealous, afraid, left under the pretense of a Temple they were building a Fortress, that might one day trouble the repose of the City; and out of this fear it was, that the Jews were commanded to go no further; so that they were forc’d to cover

it, before the Structure was brought to its intended Perfection; and this is the only reason of the Defects which the Architects observe in the Building.<sup>95</sup>

To this observer, the roof was the element of disorientation in his experience and interpretation of this architectural edifice. He considered it a “beautiful” building, but he could not escape from linking it and its construction with the persistent stereotype of Jews as malevolent and untrustworthy. Despite its beauty, the Esnoga still remained a suspicious artifact and a potential threat to Christian society.

Johann Jacob Schudt (1664-1722), a high school principal in Frankfurt, repeated the fortress story in his well-known publication *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten* (1714), in which he presented a list of “peculiarities” concerning the “allzugroße Freiheit der Juden in Holland” [the excessive freedom of the Jews in Holland].<sup>96</sup> His main concern, however, was not the Jewish attempt at building a fortress, which in his mind was not an unexpected move on the part of those power-hungry Jews. Schudt was much more upset by the scandalous fact that Christians had assisted in financing the construction of both synagogues. He could not understand “that these Jews are allowed to build such a magnificent synagogue, one that is praised as a house of God, the construction of which even receives financial support.”<sup>97</sup> Did Dutch Christians not understand that the splendid facades of these synagogues and other “exquisitely built Jewish palaces” were hiding nothing but viciousness, that once inside of these buildings all one finds is “Jews

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<sup>95</sup> B. F.’s *Voyages Historiques de l’Europe* was translated into German by August Bohse (1661-1730) under the title of *Curieuse Reisen durch Europa* and into English under the title of *A New Description of Holland and the Rest of the United Provinces In General. Containing Their Government, Laws, Religion, Policy, and Strength; Their Customs, Manners, and Riches; Their Trade to the Indies, etc.* This quotation is from the English translation of, which was published in London in 1701. That this travel account appeared in three languages suggests the high demand for popular travel literature at the end of the seventeenth century.

<sup>96</sup> We owe much of our knowledge of contemporary Jewish life to Schudt’s many observances and descriptions, compiled and published in his massive four-part work, *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten . . . /* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1714).

<sup>97</sup> Schudt wrote, “Eine allzugroße Juden-Freiheit in Holland ist es VI. daß man denen Juden verstatet so gar kostbare magnifique Synagogen zu bauen, dieselbige noch als Gottes-Häuser lobet, jawohl gar Geld zu deren Erbauung darschiesset.” In *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten*, 278.

smelling like garlic [and] old Jewish women with big Jew-noses and glasses reading books”? Did the local officials not see that by granting a loan they were contributing to their own ruin? Presenting himself as a defender of Christianity, Schudt could only explain this financial gesture by the Dutch authorities as a purely economic act performed by “Dutch men of the highest standing in the city of Amsterdam. [They] granted Jews the liberty to build a synagogue and loaned them the money to complete a wonderful and exquisite building, which certainly did not come without significant advantages to the moneylenders. Holland had reached the point of favoring small profits made in the name of God over conscience and Christian well-being.”<sup>98</sup> According to Schudt, money had clearly taken priority over religion in this mercantilist society, an observation – as we shall see later – that was not at all an overstatement.

Equally disturbing to Schudt was the treatment of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in Dutch art and literature, among others in the painting and poetry of Romeyn de Hooghe, Pieter Persoij, Balthazar Bernaerts, and Emanuel de Witte. De Hooghe, in particular, received much criticism. A well-known Dutch artist at the time and a member of Stadholder William III’s circle, de Hooghe had lauded the new synagogue in a unique series of prints that appeared, together with the inaugural sermons, in a commemorative book entitled *Sermoes que pregarão os doctos ingenios do K. K. de Taalmud Torah des ta cidade de Amsterdam* (1714). His engravings portrayed elegantly dressed Jews as well as representatives of the Dutch government gathered inside the

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<sup>98</sup> Schudt, 281. He quotes here a Nuremberg Preacher named Herr Joh. Wülffer: “Männer in Nederland von denen Hochmögenden Vorstehern der Stadt Amsterdam denen Juden die Freiheit erhalten eine Synagogue zu erbauen und haetten ihnen auch so viel Geld vorgestreckt, davon ein so herrlich und fuertrefflich Gebäu zur Vollkommenheit gebracht worden; Welches gewisslich nicht ohne grossen Vortheil solcher Impetranten und Geldvorstrecker wird geschehen sein; Dann es ist bei vielen Leuthen in Holland so weit gekommen dass die das Profeitgen Gott dem Gewissen und aller Christlichen Wohlstaendigkeit fürziehen.”

Esnoga (fig 10). One particular scene, framed by medallions bearing the names of the parnasim, was complemented by small-scale representations of the exterior and the building plan placed at the top margin of the engraving. To complete the picture, allegorical figures representing the Republic of the United Provinces, Liberty of Conscience, and Judea and the High Priest holding the Scroll of the Law were added in the corners, reinforcing with the Latin phrase *Libertas conscientiae incrementum reipublicae* (Freedom of worship is the mainspring of the Republic) the notion of religious freedom as vital to its growth and prosperity. De Hooghe complemented his engraving with a poem that extolled the new synagogue:

This is the school of Law, the Jews' house of prayer;  
 A builder's masterpiece,<sup>99</sup> the glory of the Amstel and the Y;  
 This church dedicated to God, Fears no coercion, nor pain nor death;  
 This honorable tribe of Judae, let your shoots blossom;  
 The growth of burghers will only increase the power of this land.<sup>100</sup>

Schudt could only be amazed “that this house of vice, the Portuguese Jewish synagogue, is honored so highly, that its interior, decorated with wonderful pillars, costly lanterns and lamps in large and very small sizes, is publicized so widely . . . that not just Jews but also a Christian, Romanus de Hooghe, has inflicted ridicule on to Christianity by adding his name to Dutch, Latin and French verses, as the educated reader can, with astonishment, gather from the present edition.”<sup>101</sup> Shocked by the warm approval expressed in the writings of both Jews and Christians, Schudt could only sigh and exclaim “. . . O! In was für Zeiten sind wir gerathen!”

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<sup>99</sup> This line of de Hooghe's poem is a pun on the name of the Esnoga's architect, Elias Bouman. The Dutch word for architect is “bouwman,” which has the exact same pronunciation. The “Amstel” and the “Y” in the next phrase refer to two rivers that runs through Amsterdam.

<sup>100</sup> See D. H. de Castro, *De Synagoge der Portugees-Israëlitische Gemeente te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1950), 34-35.

<sup>101</sup> Schudt, 281.

That Schudt found de Hooghe's poetry so disturbing was not merely because it celebrated the Esnoga and Dutch Jewry at large. He also passionately rejected it because it undermined the idea that the Dutch authorities objected to the construction of a Jewish synagogue on a very public site. De Hooghe's references to the Esnoga as "Bouman's masterpiece" and "the glory of the Amstel" challenged Christian suspicions about the building. When Stadtholder Prince William III of Orange thus offered to replace the wooden columns in the Esnoga with stone ones after his visit in 1690,<sup>102</sup> the only interpretation available to Schudt involved some ulterior motive, namely economic interests.

It was not uncommon for this type of criticism to go hand in hand with negative views of Dutch society at large, which were expressed not only by German but by English visitors as well, particularly at the height of the Dutch Republic's power. Travel accounts by Schudt and others expressed hostile views of Amsterdam's Jews and their new synagogues within the context of what was perceived as an increasingly secular society tolerating this "allzugroße Judenfreiheit." The British essayist and poet Owen Felltham (1602-1668), for instance, did not specifically mention Amsterdam's Jews or their houses of worship in his *Batavia, or the Hollander*, but he created the connection between Jewish stereotypes on the one hand, and the decline of Dutch society due to a preoccupation with money and trade on the other. To Felltham the Dutch were "the Jews of the New Testament that have exchanged nothing but the Law for the Gospel; and this

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<sup>102</sup> Apparently his highness expressed his surprise over the wooden columns, which had been the result of failed orders for stone materials from Germany and Italy. William intervened, which resulted in the wooden columns being replaced by stone.

they rather proress [sic] than practice.”<sup>103</sup> Annoyed with Dutch prosperity and importance in international trade, and resentful towards the Dutch as a result of ongoing Anglo-Dutch conflicts, Felltham presented a scathing and vicious account of Holland, a country inhabited by “savages,” “water devils,” and “cowards [who] live lower than the fishes.” Despite this barbarity and uncivilized behavior, however, Dutch houses and public buildings, “especially in their Cities, are the best eye-beauties of their Countrey. For Cost and Sight they far exceed ours.”<sup>104</sup> Felltham seemed to follow the pattern of praising the aesthetic quality of the built environment – although it could, of course, never exceed England’s – while disproving of those who actually inhabited it. The well-known stereotype of the Jew – his supposed wealth at the expense of others, the thin veneer barely covering his boorish and savage nature – served in this case as a model to describe the Dutch population at large.

Felltham and Schudt are admittedly rather extreme examples of this second type of response, namely that of visitors whose observations and descriptions of the religious buildings themselves were favorable but who ultimately arrived at a negative judgment regarding their representation. Whereas this tone is equally detectable in other accounts, the majority was considerably less aggressive. One might even call this “category” of responses to Jews and their synagogues rather mild in nature, perhaps even innocent, as they emerged not from an antisemitic disposition, but from Christian travelers’ unfamiliarity and misunderstanding of Jewish culture. After giving a brief description of the Sabbath service in the Creechurch Lane synagogue, our British diarist Pepys

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<sup>103</sup> Felltham, Owen. *Batavia, or the Hollander Displayed: Being Three Weeks Observations of the Lowe Country, especially Holland, in Brief Characters & Observations of the People & Country, the gouvernement of their State & Private Families, their Virtues and Vices: Also a Perfect Description of the People & Country of Scotland*. London: Printed by Steven Swart (1672). This source lacks page numbers.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.



exclaimed “But Lord, to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like Brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more; and indeed, I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.” Pepys, whose response resembled Greenhalgh’s, construed the events in the synagogue as irreverent mayhem as he was utterly unfamiliar with Jewish religious customs.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, the British traveler Thomas Penson, who visited Amsterdam in the fall of 1687, was struck by the “disorder,” which contrasted so vividly with the “magnificent” building in which it took place: “Nor did I only visit the Christian churches, but also the Jews, whose temple or synagogue is a magnificent building, to which I repaired more than once, being informed of some of their great days on which they performed some extraordinary ceremonies, which seemed to me more like madness than order.”<sup>106</sup> Penson acknowledged the beauty of the building, but he described the events taking place inside of it as uncivilized chaos. Gregorio Leti was equally complementary of the Jews’ outward appearance and manners, but could not hide his displeasure at what appeared to him to be a noisy, disorganized crowd.<sup>107</sup> The British physician John Northleigh, too, reported that he saw “near Two thousand Souls . . . in their great Church, all habited in White Silk Hoods over their Shoulders, Men and Boys [who would at times] be laughing, talking, and idly wandering, as if about prophane

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<sup>105</sup> The fact that Pepys was witnessing the Festival Service for Simchat Torah, during which the congregation sings and dances, most likely even increased his surprise.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Penson, *Penson's Short Progress into Holland, Flanders, and France, with Remarques* (1687), in Kees van Strien=s *Touring the Low Countries: Accounts of British Travellers, 1660-1720* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 41.

<sup>107</sup> Gregorio Leti, *Teatro Belgico, o vero ritratti storici, chronologici, politici, e geografici, della sette Provincie Unite*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1690), in Kaplan's *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, 26.

Affairs, though in a Presence so sacred.”<sup>108</sup> And “when they were dismissed,” wrote Phillip Skippon in amazement, “many of them went down singing till they came to the street!”<sup>109</sup> For Mrs. Calderwood, an upper-class lady of Polton, this “disorder” and “carelessness” in religious services rendered the Jews “the drollest set [she] ever saw.” During a visit to Amsterdam, she reported:

I went into their synegogue [sic] one morning, and they were at service, but what kind I could not find out, but I suppose it was a fast-day, for there were two men standing on the altar, I suppose, for it was raised higher than the rest, in the midst of the room; there was a lamp burning, though the sun was shining. They were both reading aloud, with harn clouts [literally brain cloths, a cloth around the head] on their heads, and several of the congregation had harn clouts likeways. Some were sitting with books in their hands, some standing, reading or looking on a book, some walking about, snuffing and cracking [conversing, gossiping] as loud as if they had been in the street; in short you never saw such a congregation; some were coming in, some going out, and those who went out had their harn clouts in their pockets.<sup>110</sup>

This snuffing and cracking during the service must have made some impression on Mrs. Calderwood, as she refrained from mentioning that which nearly all visitors noticed at first sight, i.e., the grandeur of the actual building. This was the first thing that struck William Carr, who reported in his *Travellours Guide and Historians Faithful Companion*, published in London in 1690, that “the *Jewes*, who are verie considerable in the trade of this citie have two synagogues, one whereof is the Largest in Christendom, and as some say in the world, sure I am, it far exceeds, those in *Rome*, *Venice*, and all other places where I have bin.”<sup>111</sup> However, within the synagogue’s court yard, he added with a disapproving voice, “they have several Roomes or schools, where their children are taught Hebrew, and verie carefully, to the shame of Christians negligence, brought up and instruckted in the Jewish principles.” While acknowledging the Esnoga exceeded any

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<sup>108</sup> John Northleigh, *Topographical Descriptions*, in Swetschinski's *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 210.

<sup>109</sup> Phillip Skippon, *Account of a Journey*, in Swetschinski's *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 209.

<sup>110</sup> Alexander Fergusson, ed. *Letters and Journals of Mrs. Calderwood of Polton From England, Holland, and the Low Countries in 1756* (Edinburgh: Printed for David Douglas, 1884), 104-106.

<sup>111</sup> William Carr, *The Travellours Guide and Historians Faithful Companion* (1690), 23.

other synagogue he had ever encountered, Carr could not hide his hope that the Jews would eventually convert to the Christian faith.

Despite their admiration of the synagogue's architecture and their descriptions of Europe's main port cities as "the beautifullest cities in the world," these visitors echoed longstanding stereotypes and prejudices of Jews. Ralph Fell unabashedly wrote that "[t]he Portuguese synagogue is perhaps the noblest temple in which Jewish worship has been celebrated, since the dispersion of that fanatic people."<sup>112</sup> John Moore repeated this belief of Jews as religious fanatics after visiting the *Judengasse* in Frankfurt: "I was twice at their synagogue. There is nothing magnificent in their worship; but much apparent zeal and fervour . . . [they] are execrated by all pious Christians."<sup>113</sup> Something must have appealed to Moore since he visited the Frankfurt synagogue twice, returning to the Jewish quarter which "you will believe, is not the sweetest part of town." He warned his readers, however, to be alert when dealing with Jews since "they [will] attack you in the street, ply at the gate of your lodgings, and even glide into your apartments, offering to supply you with every commodity you can have occasion for: and if you happen to pass by the entrance of their street, they intreat your custom with the violence and vociferation of so many Thames watermen." Religious deviation, for these contemporaries, went hand in hand with commercial immorality. To be fair, however, in most of these accounts the Jews were not singled out as other population groups are described in similarly stereotypical terms. The "Thames watermen," according to Moore, were not exactly

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<sup>112</sup> Ralph Fell, *A Tour Through the Batavian Republic during the Latter Part of the Year 1800. Containing an Account of the Revolution and Recent Events in that Country* (London: printed for R. Phillips, 1801), 254.

<sup>113</sup> John Moore, *A view of society and manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany: with anecdotes relating to some eminent characters. By a gentleman, who resided several years in those countries. In two volumes. . .* (London: printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1779), 420-421.

model citizens, nor were such religious dissenters as the Quakers, Roman Catholics, and Arminians. Other national groups, such as the Irish, or those with morally questionable professions, such as prostitutes, were equally labeled as “suspicious,” and our authors had no qualms about making sweeping generalizations about all of them.

To label Jews untrustworthy thus seemed perfectly acceptable in early modern discourse. Penson emphasized that he “must not omit (by way of caution) to speak of the Jews who are nicknamed Smouces. They are the money-changers . . . [who] will cheat a man to his face.”<sup>114</sup> Mrs. Calderwood informed her readers that they were called, “by way of reproach, *smouce*, but that is only a name for a certain sort of them; I asked a man if he was a smouce, and he said, ‘Ya, Mefrowe’ [yes, ma’am].”<sup>115</sup> The “certain sort” of Jews in her presumably light-hearted remark were clearly the Ashkenazi peddlers whose appearance, occupation, and manners could not but earn them this derogatory name. Carr, too, warned his readers to be careful of the shady way Jews did business, which “is a great mystery of Iniquity [that] enricheth one man and ruins a hundred.” He elaborated extensively on the process of buying and selling of “Actions of the Company” at the Dam Square, the Exchange, and “in the Coledges or Clubs of the Jews,” the price of which was apparently influenced by “Crafty Jews and others [who] Connived to Coine bad newes to make the Action fall, and good newes to raise them, the which craft [sic!] of doing at Amsterdam is not taken notice of, which is much to be wondered at, in such a wise Government as Amsterdam is, for it is a certain trueth they many times spread scandalous reports touching the affaires of State, which passe amongst the Ignorant for truth.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Penson, 46.

<sup>115</sup> Alexander Fergusson, ed. *Letters and Journals of Mrs. Calderwood of Polton From England, Holland, and the Low Countries in 1756* (Edinburgh: Printed for David Douglas, 1884), 104-106.

<sup>116</sup> Carr, 54, 55.

Jews might have had a splendid and state-of-the-art synagogue, but they were still not to be trusted.

Gentiles responded in similar fashion to the London synagogues. They praised the architectural value of the buildings, but their descriptions were suffused with negative stereotypes. Thomas Pennant noted that “in *Duke’s Place* the *Jews Synagogue* has been lately rebuilt, in a beautiful style of the simplest *Grecian* architecture, by Mr. *Spiller*, surveyor, and consecrated in a splendid and solemn manner,” but that it is “much inhabited by those universal traffickers the Jews.”<sup>117</sup> Greenhalgh, too, did not seem to be aware of or bothered by labeling London’s Sephardim as obstinate sinners who refused to acknowledge Christianity as the one true faith. On the contrary, he accused the Jews of being prejudiced: “[T]hey have a grosser veil over the eye of the souls, than that which covers their heads; they are so firmly possessed with an invincible prejudice against the Cross of Christ, and so doat upon their imaginary Messiah to come a temporal King that shall conquer all the princes of the earth, and make their nation Lords of all the World, that an argument from the strongest, clearest and most convincing reasons that can be brought for Christ, is but an arrow shot against a wall of brass.”<sup>118</sup> These views of Jews as obstinate, untrustworthy, immoral, even devilish, were widely-held. Repeating them in travel literature was therefore not considered shocking or inappropriate. Indeed, that travelers across northern Europe described similar views about the Jews only confirmed their legitimacy.

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<sup>117</sup> Pennant, 139.

<sup>118</sup> Greenhalgh, 57.

## Dutch Gentiles

The third and last group of responses reveals a genuine interest in Jewish synagogues. These travelogues disclose at least a partial acceptance of Jewish religious structures as an integral part of the cityscape as well as of society at large. These accounts were written almost exclusively by Dutch observers, although in the later part of the eighteenth century an increasing number by British. These authors were less negatively predisposed toward conspicuous synagogues as they came to see Jews – especially Sephardim – as contributors to the overall well-being of the Republic. That their tone and receptivity differ substantially from previously discussed observers can to a large extent be explained by the political and cultural codes prevalent in the societies from which they came. As Amos Rapoport suggested almost thirty years ago, “people’s responses [to built and natural environments] depend upon the meaning which they attach to stimuli, which is associational and, in turn, depends on past experience, and culture influencing standards and environmental evaluation.”<sup>119</sup> Our travelers’ dialogue with synagogues, in other words, was colored by the place and participation – or lack thereof – of Jews within their own socio-cultural, economic, or religious spheres as well as by popular perceptions of Jews within their immediate surroundings. Both the Dutch Republic and Britain were, in the early modern period, religiously diverse societies. Jews were only one of a multitude of religious minorities and they were not perceived as a particular threat to the existing order. Already in the early 1600s, the Amsterdam city authorities increasingly valued commercial interests over Church dogma. They fully realized that allowing a Jewish community into their midst led to an accumulation of resources and knowledge

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<sup>119</sup> Amos Rapoport, *Human Aspects of Urban Form: Towards a Man-Environment Approach to Urban Form and Design* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1977), 320.

highly lucrative to a Republic deeply involved in international trade, particularly if that community was completely self-organized and self-sufficient. The commercialization of the traditional ruling classes in combination with religious diversity created a milieu in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Holland that not only permitted Jews to gradually enter Dutch public space, be it within certain boundaries, but that also led to a less hostile reception on the part of gentiles. Coming from a culture in which the Jewish “Other” did not pose a threat and that lacked a tradition of vicious discrimination against Jews – largely due to the long absence of an organized Jewish community in this part of Europe – most Dutch and British visitors were more willing to engage in a meaningful conversation with Jewish religious buildings. Consequently, the majestic Esnoga, built “on a publick road,” did not generate the same feelings of shock and surprise as it did among German visitors.

In Prussia the situation was quite different. Despite recurring expulsions, there had been a permanent Jewish presence in German-speaking lands during the medieval period. However, the areas of Jewish settlement typically had bad reputations; they were associated with poverty, vice, even the supernatural. To most Christians, they were places that had better be avoided. Moreover, contemporary Prussian attitudes toward trade and commercial gain did not help matters. Contrary to England and Holland, where commerce was the very foundation of prosperity, in Prussia the trading profession carried a persistent stigma. The Ashkenazim were perfect representatives: the majority of Jews were involved in petty trade and money lending, and made profits off the “misery” of others. Their profession and image – as dirty, untrustworthy, immoral, dangerous, and superstitious – were easily linked. Synagogues, then, from a Prussian perspective, were

tainted. They housed, whether publicly in dignified Baroque buildings or privately in upper rooms, an inherently corrupt group of people whose presence was a continuous threat to the Christian faith.

An obvious exception is a letter written by Karl Ludwig, Freiherr von Pöllnitz, on February 2, 1733, which reveals a rare moment of self-examination and self-criticism after having observed the Jews of Amsterdam. Describing the Sephardim – the Ashkenazim generally received much less attention as they tended to confirm, rather than challenge, the stereotype of the Jew – Pöllnitz warns the recipient of his letter not to take the Esnoga’s popular architectural style as a sign of Jewish authority over Dutch urban aesthetics. Instead of falling victim to “presumptions” that associate anything Jewish with vice and transgression, a very un-Christian tendency in his opinion, this foreign traveler presents an alternative interpretation:

You will no doubt think it a Phæneomenon to find that a Hebrew, whom in Germany we treat with a Sort of Disdain, *which perhaps is neither very Generous, nor very Christian*, should concern himself in the Spectacles, and presume to force an entire Town to conform to his Taste; but you are to know, Sir, that the Jews are treated in this Government, upon quite another Footing than they are elsewhere; and really, as for the Portuguese Jews, *they deserve it*; for a *Texeyra*, a *Schwartzo*, a *Dulis*, have done such generous Actions as are worthy of the most virtuous Christians. They live like Noblemen, and indeed, such you would take them to be. They are admitted into all Assemblies, and even their Wives appear there: They treat and receive all Persons of Distinction at their Houses: They relieve our Poor, contribute to our Churches, and *differ in nothing from us but in frequenting the Synagogue.*<sup>120</sup>

Pöllnitz’s early eighteenth-century comments are not unlike the arguments brought to the fore by liberal-minded and Reformed German Jews a century later, which stated that the only distinction between Jews and gentiles was their religious faith and that they were “worthy” of better treatment, i.e. Emancipation. This traveler’s observations of Amsterdam’s Sephardim in the context of Dutch religious progressivism, in combination

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<sup>120</sup> Karl Ludwig, Freiherr von Pöllnitz, *The Memoirs of Baron Charles Lewis von Pöllnitz: Being the Observations He Made in his Late Travels from Prussia thro' Germany, Italy, France, Flanders, Holland, England, &c. . . In Letters to his Friend . . .* / Translated by Stephen Whatley (London: Printed for Daniel Brown, 1737). This quote is taken from Letter 52, Feb. 2, 1733, p. 410.



with his own cultural background, produced an interpretation that not only questioned the negative stereotyping of Jews, but that hints at an alternative outlook – one that viewed Sephardim as part of, rather than a threat to, Western culture and society. “As for the Portuguese Jews, they deserve it,” contends Pöllnitz, as in his eyes these “gentlemen” seem to have adopted the dominant social and cultural values of Dutch society. Pöllnitz refrains, however, from elaborating on the city’s Ashkenazim, and we can only guess that he might not have considered them “qualified” for this kind of honor. His views on the Jews of Hamburg confirm this:

The Jews have their Synagogue here. What an odd Establishment is this in a Christian Country! How uncharitable, and even nonsensical! . . . We grant Synagogues to the Jews, the Enemies of Jesus Christ, who would crucify him again, if they had not done it already; and we refuse Churches and Temples to those that believe as we do, in Jesus Christ! No, were you to call me Heretic a thousand times, I would say, HOLLAND FOR EVER! where ‘tis a Maxim, to leave every Man to his Conscience; and where they think it would be a Contradiction to admit People to be their Fellow-Citizens, and to deny them the Liberty of worshipping God in their own Way.

While still suffused with anti-Jewish rhetoric, Pöllnitz’s remarks target not the Jews, but a Christian society that tolerates a Jewish synagogue but bans a Catholic church. Only in a society that grants religious liberty to everyone do synagogues make “sense”; it might even turn the “enemies of Christ” into “gentlemen.”

The outlook that prevailed in Holland, which gave rise to what Pöllnitz called the “phenomenon” of Jewish “Spectacles,” was deeply imbedded in the economic make-up of the Dutch Republic. In fact, the general lack of suspicion or bias toward Jews and their synagogues in early modern Dutch travel literature can be partially ascribed to the role Jews played in Amsterdam’s economy, and reflects the mercantilist lens through which many natives observed their surroundings. It was well-known that the presence of Jews attracted trade and investors to the city, and that considerable contributions were made on

their part in financing the three Anglo-Dutch wars between 1652 and 1678.<sup>121</sup> Cornelis de Witt explains in a letter dated in 1688 and addressed to a British friend that many Jews and other “Refugees consist of Merchants, Artificers [sic], or Laborious Tradesmen, that like Bees, wherever they come, bring in Honey to the common Hive. . . I know not how relishing this [is] to your coy *English* Pallates; but as I can assure you, ‘tis perfectly true. . . [it] is one of the greatest Charms, as well as chiefest Supports, of this Flourishing Republick.”<sup>122</sup> Their extensive network of commercial and financial relations, an enterprise that proved particularly beneficial to the Dutch war effort, contributed to the overall well-being of both the Jewish community and the Republic at large. Jews were thus closely connected to economic success and power, and Dutch contemporaries were only too proud to attribute the Republic’s prominence on the world map to Holland’s cosmopolitan and religiously diverse character. Moreover, the prevailing ethos of commercial gain prevented a stigma from being attached to the financial and commercial activities in which the majority of Jews were involved. In other parts of Europe, particularly Central Europe, it was not uncommon for these kinds of activities to be perceived as suspicious and un-noble, and the fact that a disproportionate high percentage of Jews found their profession in commerce and trade aggravated an already strained Christian-Jewish relationship. In the Dutch Republic, however, these occupational spheres were highly respected and Jewish preeminence in this line of work much welcomed. Commercial power, mercantilist ideology, and the universalist liberal principle of “freedom of conscience” thus constituted vital components in Holland’s

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<sup>121</sup> Three conflicts took place between the English and the Dutch over control of the seas and expansion of their empires: from 1652 to 1654, from 1664 to 1667, and from 1672 to 1678.

<sup>122</sup> Cornelis de Witt, *A Letter from Holland, Touching Liberty of Conscience* (London: Printed for E. R., 1688), 2, 5.

success formula. Casper Commelin, whose *Beschryvinge van Amsterdam* (Descriptions of Amsterdam) appeared in 1694, informs his audience of the important connection between religious diversity and the capital's power:

[T]his unconstrained Liberty from a dismal and ungodly coercion of conscience is the primary reason for the blossoming state of this city, since it invites all kinds of people from all corners of the World, especially those who cannot practice nor experience their Religion publicly, to come and live in this City . . . Lutheran, "Remonstranten" or Arminians, Mennonites or "Doopsgezinden" also have their Churches; there is an English Brownist Church located in the Barnesteeg . . . as well as Jewish synagogues where Jews openly practice their Religion. This almost appears to be the only reason for the rise and preservation of this City, which will, without doubt, continue to prosper as long as everyone is permitted the liberty to practice their Religion and the liberty of Conscience.

To strengthen his claim, Commelin includes a poem by the well-known contemporary poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel entitled "To Religious Liberty," which directly links Amsterdam's prosperity to the freedom of conscience:

Alongside the Amstel, and alongside the Y is wonderfully exposed, she who, like an Empress, wears the crown of Europe;  
Amsterdam, raising her head toward the Heavens, and pounding poles into its marshes, as if in Pluto's chest;  
Which waters do not see the shadows of her sails? At what markets does she not sell her goods?  
Which peoples does she not see in the light of the moon? She who lays down the laws to the grey Ocean;  
She extends her wings further by an accumulation of souls, and carries her overstocked keels into the World;  
This prosperity will be hers, as long as the distinguished [city] council denies religious coercion her evil will.

Although Dutch tolerance of religious minorities resulted more from practical commercial interests than from a principled belief in the moral superiority of religious diversity,<sup>123</sup> it nevertheless allowed the Amsterdam Jewish communities to thrive and to become a visible and common component of the city's urban landscape. And it is this visibility that, in the words of British traveler William Temple, "contribute[d] much to make *conversation*, and [that made] all the offices of common life so easie, among so

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<sup>123</sup> De Witt fully realized that the scales increasingly favored economic concerns over religious dogma. He reports: ". . . thô I know Peoples *Passions* have a strange Byass on their *Judgments*, yet a Wise Man may be tempted to suspect something *more* in this case [concerning Liberty of Conscience], and that the Humour is fomented and encouraged by the secret Influences of some *powerful interest*: for 't is *That* commonly moves the Wheels, though Religion may be made the pretence." De Witt, 1.

different Opinions, Of which so many several persons are often in every man's eye; [N]o man checks or takes offence at Faces or Customs, or Ceremonies he sees every day, As at those he hears of in places far distant, and perhaps by partial relations.”<sup>124</sup> Although Temple's descriptions admittedly have an overly glowing tone to them – he was deeply impressed with what he saw in Holland and had a tendency to idealize his experiences – at the very least they suggest that anti-Jewish sentiments did not constitute an intrinsic and overt element in the structure of Dutch society.

The realization that the Jewish community was not merely a religious body, but also a highly lucrative economic entity that greatly benefited the city's financial interests, rendered potential Christian objections to granting Jews certain privileges less and less urgent.<sup>125</sup> This civic toleration went hand in hand with the gradual reduction of the Church's influence in the economic and political spheres in the late seventeenth-century. A mercantilist ethos that welcomed religious diversity and that considered the meddling of the Dutch Reformed Church in political and commercial activities increasingly inappropriate, challenged both the authority of the Church and the belief of its omnipotent power in every facet of society. This process, maintains historian Daniel Swetschinski, led to “the delimitation of a sphere of public life in which religious opinions [were] not of primary concern,”<sup>126</sup> and in which the public presence of Jews was not perceived as a threat to Dutch religious identity. In other words, an early form of *Realpolitik* on the part of the local magistrates, in which a pragmatic mindset prevailed

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<sup>124</sup> William Temple, *Observations Upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands. By Sir William Temple of Shene, in the County of Surrey, Baronet, Ambassador at the Hague, and at Aix la Chappelle, in the year 1668* (London: printed by A. Maxwell, 1673), 207.

<sup>125</sup> Odette Vlessing, “The Excommunication of Baruch Spinoza: The Birth of a Philosopher,” in *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture, 1500-2000*, ed. by Jonathan Israel and Reinier Salverda (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 143.

<sup>126</sup> Swetschinski, 39.

over religious ideology, permitted Jews to build stately synagogues on prominent locations as the former were willing to subordinate purely religious considerations to the attractions this commercially valuable group had to offer. The risk of having Sephardi merchants – as well as the less wealthy but still tax-paying Ashkenazim – leave for such places as London or Hamburg, the result of which would mean a significant loss of enterprise and revenue, was simply too great. Jews, as well as other religious minorities in Holland, thus profited from the mounting tension between jurisdiction and local legislation.<sup>127</sup>

The relatively liberal conditions in which Jews lived also derived from the ruling classes' awareness that powerful minorities pose less of a danger to the existing order when tolerated publicly than when they are condemned to practice in secret. De Witt gave voice to this view in his 1688 *Letter from Holland*, in which he writes that “granting Liberty of Conscience secures the Government and renders it easy; takes away all Colour for Faction or Rebellion: Nothing binds more firmly than Interest, and no Interest is more strongly obliging, or more beloved, than this Freedom; and therefore ties all the Inhabitants where they have it, into a strict Fidelity to that Power which grants it.”<sup>128</sup> Peace and stability, or, as historian Joris van Eijnatten phrased it, a “calculated peace,”<sup>129</sup> outweighed the potential annoyance of Christians as a result of a growing presence and participation of Jews in the public sphere. In fact, tolerating a minor sect oftentimes proved far easier than putting up with a rival denomination, which partially explains why

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<sup>127</sup> Jozeph Michman elaborates on this dualism in *Pinkas: Geschiedenis van de Joodse Gemeenschap in Nederland*, p. 15. Whereas the Dutch Calvinist Church enjoyed a special status, Michman contends it no longer had a decisive voice in local politics – as opposed to Britain. This does not necessarily mean that religious ideology weakened. It is merely to say that in the political and economic realm the civil authorities had become more influential.

<sup>128</sup> De Witt, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Joris van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 18.

Jews received considerably less attention than local Catholic dissenters whose religious identity was much closer to the norm.<sup>130</sup> The Remonstrant Johan Uytenbogaert was not far off when he remarked: “You [Hollanders] are a strange kind of people; you bear harder upon those that differ but little from you, than upon those who differ much.”<sup>131</sup> Johann Kaspar Riesbeck made a similar point in a letter to his brother, in which he remarked that

It is a remarkable phenomenon, dear brother, in the history of human understanding, that while philosophers all contend, that the more alike men are, the more they love each other, in religion it should be quite different. Here the more likeness is the more hatred. A member of one of the great houses . . . would ten times rather treat with a Jew than with a Lutheran, though the Lutheran’s religion and his own are so nearly alike. In Holland the reformed are much more favourable to the Catholics than to the Lutherans, and the States General had much rather allow the former freedom of religion than the latter. . . you will find it universally, the nearer the religious sects approach, the more they hate one another.<sup>132</sup>

Riesbeck, a Protestant, was wrong about Holland but his overall point is well-taken. From this perspective, then, Catholic *schuilkerken* [concealed chapels] were much more dangerous to the establishment than conspicuous Jewish synagogues.

It is from this milieu that most of our Dutch observers came, and it is these notions of civic toleration and religious pluralism, as well as the passion for commerce, that reverberate in their observations of synagogues. Whereas foreign travelers were often surprised or annoyed with what they perceived as a laxity of the Dutch toward the growth and prosperity of Amsterdam’s Jews – “as long as you are a good and faithful burgher,

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<sup>130</sup> Miriam Bodian makes a similar point in her book *Hebrews of the Portugese Nation*: “Indeed, it was precisely because of the underlying closeness [between Calvinists, Catholics, Anabaptists, and Remonstrants] that they were intensely engaged with each other, as rivals and claimants to the truth. The Jews lay outside these conflicts . . . Jews, though attacked on occasion by zealous clergy, were not singled out as the enemy, the dangerous outsider. . . it was a demonized ‘popery’ against which Protestant preachers fulminated.” *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 55.

<sup>131</sup> See Swetschinski, 26.

<sup>132</sup> Johann Kaspar Riesbeck, *Travels Through Germany, in a Series of Letters; Written in German by the Baron Riesbeck, and Translated by the Rev. Mr. Maty, Late Secretary to the Royal Society, and under Librarian to the British Museum. Vol. I* (London: printed for T. Cadel, 1787), 141.

nobody cares what you believe!,” reported the astonished author of *Curieuse Reisen* in the late 1600s – contemporary Dutch writings overall lack these strong sentiments. In fact, the Dutch contemporary poet Roeland van Leuve, whose book on Amsterdam is written entirely in rhyme, labeled anyone who uses such derogatory terms as “smous” for a Jewish burgher “slegt volk,” or “bad people,” and counted Jews among “Amsterdam’s virtuous Fathers.”<sup>133</sup> Travel accounts by, among others, Casper Commelin, Olfert Dappert, Jacob de Riemer, and a variety of anonymous authors, as well as contemporary writings and paintings by Romeyn de Hooghe, Joost van den Vondel, Pieter Persoij, Balthazar Bernaerts, Emanuel de Witte, and Bernard Picart vary from rather neutral to highly positive receptions with regard to the emergence of Jewish religious structures. Their engagement with the built form within the context of a relatively liberal religious, political, and economic climate produced an interpretation that rendered the Esnoga and the Great Synagogue respectable products of the Golden Age. That their positive descriptions and depictions also indirectly confirmed the virtuousness of the Dutch themselves – and thus of the individual author or painter – was, certainly, a nice *encore*.

This is, of course, not to say that there were no oppositional voices in Holland at this time, or that Jews were fully accepted burghers untouched by prejudice or intolerance. A number of Calvinist preachers and theologians in particular expressed anger and anxiety about “deceitful” Jews, whose increasingly public form of Jewish worship was a blasphemous and scandalous development. But whereas these voices were

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<sup>133</sup> Roeland van Leuve writes: “who does not honor the virtue of Amsterdam's Fathers? / Each of whom approaches God his own way, whether Roman or non-Roman, whether Christian or Jew / The latter own a large and beautiful synagogue, built by prosperous Portuguese who disobey the Law of Moses / And another synagogue, smaller but equally beautiful, was built by what bad people would consider Smousjes.” See Roeland van Leuve, *'s Werelds Koopslot, of de Amsteldamsche Beurs* (Amsterdam: Jacobus Verheyden, 1723), 84.

heard, they failed to have an impact on the position of Dutch Jews, who progressively gained access into public domains, nor did they give rise to a literary tradition of demonization.<sup>134</sup> The main target remained not the Jewish, but the Catholic minority. Similarly, we do not know whether the generally positive attitude of well-to-do Dutch travelers or educated artists represents the mainstream burgher in Holland. Late seventeenth-century travel accounts do not tell us whether the average Christian shopkeeper harbored virulent anti-Jewish sentiments, or whether his wife believed local Jews were conspiring against the Christian authorities by building a fortress in the Jewish neighborhood, so they could finally achieve the power they had always craved for. However, what we do know is that a certain segment of Dutch society produced in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century a body of art and literature that seemed to be less negatively predisposed toward the emergence of the Esnoga and the Great Synagogue. Many of these interpretations had an almost self-congratulatory tone to them, reminding readers that these exquisite buildings were part of Amsterdam's urban panorama only because of the virtue and generosity of the larger Dutch society. It was thus not unusual for Jewish synagogues to be used as evidence of Dutch exceptionalism regarding its religious climate and commercial power, even though the latter already showed serious signs of decline in the early eighteenth century. The atypical status of Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Holland during this time, one might conclude, thus

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<sup>134</sup> That the Jews received a relatively mild response from Calvinist circles might also have been related to the latter's interests in the study of Hebrew. Yoseph Kaplan states at one point that Jews were not the "average" religious minority as many theologians became increasingly interested in exploring the links between the roots of Christendom and Hebrew texts. The religious discussions between Christian scholars and Jewish intellectuals in the course of the seventeenth century, maintains Kaplan, not merely strengthened an oftentimes recently acquired Jewish religious identity but also created -- albeit modest -- bridges between two different religious and intellectual traditions. Christians, however, engaged in these discussions primarily with the intent to convert Jews to Christendom. See Kaplan, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland*, 166-168.



generated an equally unconventional response on the part of affluent Dutch observers to the emergence of prominent Jewish synagogues.

### **The Eighteenth Century**

In the second half of the eighteenth century a number of important changes took place. London had passed Amsterdam as the principal commercial metropolis of Europe, particularly after the dawning of the industrial revolution.<sup>135</sup> Amsterdam, which stumbled into a long-term economic recession after almost a century of hegemony in world trade, stagnated as London began its ascent in size and influence. Berlin, too, grew in prominence and became the main residence for Prussian royalty and intellectuals, whose fondness of opera, coffee houses, the arts, and aristocratic architecture transformed the urban landscape. All three of these north European cities fell under the influence of eighteenth-century enlightenment ideas, which gradually altered long-held beliefs about the role of religion, science, and authority. No longer were the laws of the world exclusively explained by Providence; scientific justifications and rational explorations were increasingly accepted as valid alternatives. Reason, in short, slowly began to replace Revelation as the source of Truth. This growing emphasis on knowledge and science demoted the Christian Church as the only “true” religion, allowing not merely the possibility of multiple paths to God and salvation but also the reevaluation of those people who did not conform to the Christian ideal.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Francis Sheppard argues that we should no longer think of the industrial revolution in the traditional sense as being compressed between 1780 and 1830, but as a much more gradual process that has its origins already in the seventeenth century. A closer look at the effects of metropolitan demand and the contribution of the service sector in England’s economy suggests that England began to vie for economic pre-eminence long before the 1780s. See Francis Sheppard, *London, A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 224.

<sup>136</sup> This is not to imply that Enlightenment thinkers did not think of Jews in negative terms. Many continued to believe Jews were corrupt, dirty, untrustworthy etc., but they no longer viewed them as

The eighteenth century was also increasingly an age of travel. Improvements in transportation enhanced the passion for movement and allowed individual Europeans – not merely the nobility – to explore freely their own and neighboring countries and to record their impressions. The explosion of literature, from newspapers and weeklies to novels and travel guides, nourished people’s curiosity and imagination, even more so as it became more affordable to purchase books and newspapers on a regular basis. London in particular, which developed into the epicenter of government, trade, finance, entertainment, and fashion over the course of the 1700s, struck visitors with awe. Moritz, our German traveler, writes: “How great had seemed Berlin to me when first I saw it from the tower of St. Mary’s and looked down on it from the hill at Tempelhof; how insignificant it now seemed when I set it in my imagination against London! It is vain to try to describe such a scene in words and even less in writing, for only a shadow of the impression can be so portrayed. He who would see a world in little, let him come here and gaze.”<sup>137</sup> Many did come and, like Moritz, gazed. They witnessed a capital that was expanding at an almost feverish pace as it tried to accommodate close to a million people by the late 1700s, a number that would double by the 1850s. They saw the emergence of the New Custom House, the new Stock Market, and the East India House, as well as the Bank of England and the newly-constructed Westminster Bridge – all products of England’s heavy involvement in international trade and industry. By the end of the eighteenth century there were Road Acts, Lighting Acts and Pavement Acts, aiming to

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damned. Rather, their “problems” could be explained by the environment in which they live, one that “naturally” pushed Jews into crime through persecution and harassment. Theological justifications were thus replaced by secular ones. This was an important shift, particularly because it allowed the possibility of “improvement.” Whereas religious explanations had dictated that poverty and inferiority were God’s way of showing the world the eternal damnation of the Jewish people – a permanent status – enlightenment thought contained the opportunity for change: a change in human behavior, in socio-economic status, in Jewish-Christian relations.

<sup>137</sup> Moritz, 76.

assert some control over what contemporaries appropriately called London's "building influenza."<sup>138</sup> Pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall and Ranelagh offered arcaded promenades, concert pavilions and tea rooms for those who wished to escape the tumult of the city. Many accounts give vivid portrayals of a bustling metropolis, an abundant display of goods and wares, shops, coffeehouses, chimneysweepers, newspaper sellers, and night watchmen. August Hermann Niemeyer aptly compared the London streets to a "highly unusual and unique play, for which no one has to pay a ticket."<sup>139</sup> Churches, too, abounded; over three hundred embellished the London cityscape by the late eighteenth century, half of which were Anglican. There were also churches, chapels and meeting houses for Catholics, French Protestants, Quakers and Baptists, as well for Presbyterians and Independents.<sup>140</sup> It was indeed "the country of sects," as Voltaire concluded in his *Philosophical Letters*; "An Englishman, as a free man, goes to Heaven by whatever road he pleases."

Many observers, however, also witnessed the negative consequences of intense and rapid urban growth. Dire poverty, dirt and squalor, and perpetual smoke from coal were part of everyday life for the vast majority of Londoners. "This smoke," writes Jean Pierre Grosley in 1772, "being loaded with terrestrial particles, and rolling in a thick, heavy atmosphere, forms a cloud which envelopes London like a mantle; a cloud which the sun pervades but rarely; a cloud which, recoiling back upon itself, suffers the sun to break out only now and then, which casual appearance procures the Londoners a few of

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<sup>138</sup> Henry Kett wrote in 1787: "The contagion of the building influenza. . . has extended its virulence to the country where it rages with unabating violence. . . The metropolis is manifestly the centre of disease." Cited in Ackroyd, 427.

<sup>139</sup> August Hermann Niemeyer, *Beobachtungen auf Reisen in und ausser Deutschland: nebst Erinnerungen and denkwürdige Lebenserfahrungen und Zeitgenossen in den letzten fünfzig Jahren* (Halle, 1822), 110.

<sup>140</sup> Schwartz, 3.

what they call *glorious days*.”<sup>141</sup> Virtually all travel accounts speak of smog, and while many complain about its intensity, they also describe it as the new reality of a rising metropolis.

The Jews of London, whose numbers increased considerably during the Georgian period, were part and parcel of this urban scene. While there were only a handful of Jews – mostly Sephardim – in London before the 1700s, in the mid-eighteenth century there were between seven and eight thousand, most of whom were Ashkenazi immigrants. This number would again double by the turn of the century. In contrast to the late 1600s, the bulk of Anglo-Jewry at this time, Ashkenazim as well as Sephardim, was poor; they had left the continent in search of a better future and London offered both economic prospects and freedom from harassment. They clustered in the easternmost part of the City of London, for pragmatic as well as sentimental reasons. Immigrants tend to be drawn to their own communities as it makes them feel less isolated in an unfamiliar environment. Residential cohesion, however, also provided Jews with all the necessary amenities, such as kosher butchers, Jewish schools, and synagogues, which enhanced their chances of making a living. Trade and industry in London were concentrated locally; Spitalfields was known for silk-weaving, Clerkenwell for clock- and watch making, Southwark for hatmaking. For Jews, whether prosperous merchants involved in international commerce or poor peddlers dealing in second-hand clothes, the eastern part of the City, situated close to docks and known for its retail trade, was the most rational place for settlement.

Jewish peddlers must have been common in the London streets as they appeared in numerous caricatures and popular songs:

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<sup>141</sup> Grosley, *A Tour Through London: Or, New Observations on England, and Its Inhabitants . . .* Translated from the French by Thomas Nugent, Vol. I (Dublin: printed for J. Exshaw, E. Lynch, J. Williams, R. Moncrieffe, T. Walker, and C. Jenkin, 1772), 44.

When I to London first came in; How I began to gape and stare!  
The cries they kick'd up such a din, Fresh lobsters, dust, and wooden ware;  
A Damsel lovely and black ey'd; Trip thro' the streets and sweetly cry'd  
Buy my live sprats! Buy my live sprats! A youth on t'other side the way,  
With coarser lungs did echoing say, Buy my live sprats!

Still shriller cry'd the chimney sweep; The fruit'ress fair bawl'd round and sound,  
The Jew would down the aera peep; To look for custom under ground;  
The bag he o'er his shoulder flung; And to the footman sweetly sung,  
Cloaths to sell – cloaths – Round and sound – sweep!  
Young soot did cry in accent true; The barrow lady and the Jews,  
Round and sound – cloaths.

A noise at every turn you find; Ground ivey, rabbits, skins to sell,  
Great news from France, and knives to grind, Mats, muffins, milk, and mackarel;  
And when these motley noises die; In various tones the watchmen cry,  
By the clock – twelve – pas twelve o'clock; Then home to bed the shopmen creep,  
And all the night are kept from sleep; With past – humph – o'clock.<sup>142</sup>

This “slip-song,” which appeared in *The Humours of London* (c. 1780), wonderfully describes, although somewhat romantically, the everyday sights and sounds of the British capital. It is suffused with motion; the spreading of news, the sweeping of chimneys, and the selling of goods expose a sense of energy and promise that rendered London a highly appealing place for Jewish immigrants. Its quality of allurement was quite similar to that of Amsterdam a century earlier: the commercialization of the traditional ruling classes, which increasingly discredited the involvement of religion in economic spheres, promoted a rational rather than an emotional approach to business.<sup>143</sup> Making commercial profits was the principal aim, even if this meant the active participation of non-Anglicans or non-Christians. This created favorable conditions for London's Jews who, like their brethren on the continent, were disproportionately involved in trade. As in Holland, their profession did not carry a stigma but was instead considered central to the well-being of the country. Moreover, Britain equally developed a noninterventionist view of the state or, to use Todd Endelman's words, “a quasi-laissez-faire theory of government.” While

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<sup>142</sup> This song appeared in *The Humours of London* (London, c. 1780).

<sup>143</sup> See Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 34-35.

the continent showed tendencies of political centralization, in England the “state” constituted a rather disorganized medley of local authorities who “intervened relatively infrequently in the lives of its citizens . . . due in part to its administrative inability to do so and in part to a strong conviction that the state should not regulate and supervise the beliefs and activities of its citizens.”<sup>144</sup> In a milieu that valued commercial gain and that increasingly considered religious convictions a private affair, Jews – as did other religious and ethnic minorities – felt very much at home.

This is not to imply that there was no antisemitism in eighteenth century London, or that Jews faced no limitations. Anti-Jewish sentiments, although mostly non-violent, did occur. Antisemitic caricatures were not unusual in newspapers and magazines, nor were bigoted remarks in more durable literary works. John Mottley, in his *History and Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1753), gives a number of reasons “humbly offered to the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, and Court of Aldermen, against a Jew (who is a known Enemy to the Christian Religion) his being admitted a Broker. . . [O]ther Petitioners [contribute] to the Publick Charge, and have a native Right to the Immunities and Privileges of *Englishmen* and Citizens, which the *Jews* have not. . . *Jews*, or any other Foreigners.”<sup>145</sup> To Mottley, Jews were sinful outsiders undeserving of the privileges of citizenship. Our German traveler Moritz, too, overheard anti-Jewish remarks while on his way to Richmond:

In Kensington, where we stopped, a Jew applied for a place along with us; but as there was no seat vacant in the inside, he would not ride on the outside; which seemed not quite to please my traveling companions. They could not help thinking it somewhat preposterous, that a Jew should be ashamed to ride on the outside, or on any side, and in any way: since, as they added, he was

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<sup>144</sup> Endelman, 36.

<sup>145</sup> John Mottley, *History and Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster, Borough of Southwark, and Parts Adjacent. . . The Whole Being an Improvement of Mr. Stow's, and Other Historical Writers and Surveys. . . By a Gentleman of the Inner-Temple. Vol. 2* (London: printed for M. Cooper, W. Reeve, and C. Sympson, 1753), 408.

nothing more than a Jew. This antipathy and prejudice against the Jews, I have noticed to be far more common here, than it is even with us, who certainly are not partial to them.”<sup>146</sup>

While it is doubtful that antisemitism was more prevalent in Britain than in Prussia, Moritz’s observation does indicate that expressions such as these were not uncommon. However, they did not translate into anti-Jewish legislation or – as in Germany – into national debates about the status of Jews in society. Jews were a relatively small community in a city of close to a million people, and they were one of several religious minorities in a society that regarded religious leniency as one of the secrets of its success. Holland’s mercantilist approach toward Jews had served as a good example, and had not gone unnoticed by British contemporaries. Already in 1714 John Toland, who did not “envy those whole streets of magnificent buildings that the Jews have erected at Amsterdam,” suggested a change in policy: “allowing an unlimited Liberty of Conscience, and receiving all nations to the right of citizens, the country is ever well stockt with people, and consequently both rich and powerful to an eminent degree. . . [The Jews] are obedient, peaceable, useful, and advantageous as any.”<sup>147</sup>

That Jews felt at home in London is well-known. They felt sufficiently safe and confident to worship publicly and to erect a number of synagogues. When we consider the growing number of Jews who moved to the capital, however, it is rather surprising that not more prayer houses were built. The Bevis Marks, Hambro, and Great Synagogues combined provided room for roughly a few hundred worshipers, not nearly enough for the growing population of Jewish males in the city in the mid-1700s. This

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<sup>146</sup> Moritz, 113.

<sup>147</sup> John Toland, *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland, On the Same Foot with All Other Nations. Containing also, A Defense of the Jews against all Vulgar Prejudices in all Countries* (London, 1714), 6, 10, 17. Toland wrote this essay during the public debate over the naturalization of foreign-born Jews in England. Published anonymously, it was one of the first pleas for the comprehensive toleration of Anglo-Jewry.

suggests that Jews either congregated in small minyanim, or that religious observance became less of a priority.<sup>148</sup> Certainly the absence of strong communal institutions monitoring Jews' behavior, widespread religious laxity, and the precedence of making a living over religious devotion rendered the building of new synagogues a less pressing matter. The only contribution was the New Synagogue, which had been founded in 1761 as the result of a conflict within the community. The press announced that "a company of Jews, natives of Germany, are subscribing a sum of money for erecting and enclosing a new synagogue near Bricklayers' Hall in Leadenhall Street." This new congregation occupied the building of "The Worshipful Company of Tylers and Bricklayers," a charming and unpretentious Elizabethan structure that displayed the symbols of the building trade near the entrance door (fig. 11). The New Synagogue was located next door to the Cock Tavern, which stored its wines in a cellar underneath the prayer hall. The close proximity of piety to pleasure found its way in a popular rhyme: "The spirits above are spirits divine; the spirits below are spirits of wine."<sup>149</sup> The 1811 edition of the *European Magazine* included a rabbi in traditional garb in one of its illustrations of the synagogue so as to indicate to its readers that this building belonged to the Jews.<sup>150</sup>

London Jews did witness two major reconstructions of the Great Synagogue, one in the 1760s and another at the turn of the century, both of which were most likely inspired by the need to prevent members from joining the two secessionist congregations. More importantly, there was a growing desire among the Anglo-Jewish elites to assert

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<sup>148</sup> At the turn of the century, when the Jewish population in London had risen to nearly 15,000, we do see the emergence of new congregations, particularly of Polish or Dutch Jews clustering together. The Polish Synagogue, for instance, was founded around 1790 and dedicated its new shul in Cutler Street, Houndsditch, in 1804. Most of these congregations were small and convened in rooms converted to synagogues.

<sup>149</sup> Lindsay, 89.

<sup>150</sup> Wischnitzer, 166.



publicly their improving socio-economic status. Erecting buildings dedicated to the worship of God was an indication of religious allegiance and highly respected in upper-class circles. The reconstructions in the second half of the eighteenth century were thus a product of a Jewish philanthropy very much flavored by secular motives. While Frederick the Great (1740-1786) still limited Jewish residence in Berlin at this time, making elaborate rebuilding efforts unnecessary, in London these expansions acted as markers of social progress – one that had but little to do with religious devotion.

The first renovation was commissioned to the City Surveyor, George Dance Sr., and his son George Jr., both well-known architects. They enlarged the building significantly – it became the biggest Jewish place of worship in London, exceeding Bevis Marks – and introduced neo-Classical design elements such as Corinthian columns and pilasters. A second reconstruction took place twenty years later. The Welsh naturalist and antiquary, Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), noted in *Some Account of London* that “[i]n Duke’s Place the Jews Synagogue has been rebuilt, in a beautiful style of the simplest Grecian architecture, by Mr. Spiller, surveyor, and consecrated in a splendid and solemn manner.” This time Judith Hart Levy, the daughter of Moses Hart and widow of the prosperous financier Elias Levy, had hired the Christian architect James Spiller to reconstruct the Great Synagogue. She donated £4,000 to the project – a third of the total cost – and in 1790 an elegant brick building emerged, one that offered space for 750 people (including 250 seats for women). Although more spacious and luxurious than the building’s exterior would suggest, the interior remained respectfully modest and showed great similarities to the Great Synagogue of Amsterdam. The grilles and parapets of the women’s galleries, through which sliced large Ionic columns, were unadorned, as was the

large oval bimah. Even the ark, placed in a curved apse on the eastern wall and screened by two marbleized columns, lacked lavishly decorated woodwork. The only real decoration was the gilt-edged plaques placed on either side of the ark, most likely inscribed with prayers and honors for England's ruling monarchs. Particularly eye-catching, however, were the large and numerous windows in the north and south walls and the ten rosettes in the ceiling, which bathed the entire prayer hall in light. A depiction in *The Microcosm of London* shows this quite well (fig. 12). Sunbeams, providing warmth and visibility, are coming in from behind the women's seats, illuminating all objects in their path – a different situation than earlier designs indeed, where women were oftentimes deprived of such comforts. An additional feature worth noting is the incorporation of a small pulpit on one side of the ark, attesting to Christian influence on London's synagogue design. As with the Bevis Marks building in 1700, we can observe here an interesting blend of traditional synagogue- and British church design.

The addition of the New Synagogue and the reconstruction of the Great Synagogue in the late eighteenth century contributed to an emerging pattern of Anglo-Jewish synagogue building, namely the construction of public but unpretentious buildings that attracted neither the praise nor the resentment of gentiles. They neither hid nor propagated Jewish worship; they were just “there.” The Great Synagogue was a relatively large building, the construction of which received attention in contemporary newspapers and magazines. It welcomed visits by royal guests, foreign travelers, and local city-dwellers. Its presence on the urban scene, however, continued to be discreet, not merely with respect to location – the Great Synagogue was rebuilt on the very same site in the

City – but also with respect to its design. Jewish symbolism on the exterior walls, for instance, was rare.

This lack of grandeur made synagogues second-rate sites of attraction to observers. Gentiles made occasional visits to Jewish synagogues in the late eighteenth century, but their accounts do not give the impression that they were part of the tourist agenda. Travelers oftentimes made a tour of different kinds of churches and chapels on Sundays, during which they would attend the services of numerous denominations. Synagogues are mentioned in this context from time to time, but they do not receive much attention. Walter Harrison, who mentioned the Great Synagogue in *A New and Universal History, Description and Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1776), seems rather typical: “A little to the north of St. James’s church, in Dukes-place, is a Jews Synagogue, which has been lately so enlarged as almost to join the church.” Harrison mentioned the prayer house in passing, but he neither took the time to observe the inside, nor to attend services. If he did, he certainly did not feel inclined to tell his readers about it. It seems as if these prayer houses were swallowed up by the perpetually expanding city, a city that had an abundance of cultural sites to offer, one in which synagogues – now more commonplace than before – were not a novelty and were simply ignored.

Amsterdam also witnessed the addition of a few synagogues, which brought their total number to five by the late 1760s, offering seating to 2300 men and 800 women. Right next to the Great Synagogue the Ashkenazi community built the New Synagogue, an elegant structure built in the Regency style by Gerard Frederik Maybaum and very traditional in its design plan. Having received permission in 1750 to purchase and tear

down the four houses adjacent to the existing synagogue – only separated by a narrow building that would serve as a mikveh – the community built a nearly square structure approximately 60 feet long and 60 feet wide. With its richly decorated and fenceless doorway facing the main street, its large round headed windows, and its charming central dome, the new building followed the Dutch tradition of constructing prominent synagogues in the public domain. By the turn of the century three more synagogues had appeared, one located at the Waterloo Square (then called Stroommarkt) and inaugurated by the burial society “Gemiloeth Chassadiem”<sup>151</sup> The second was founded in the Rapenburgerstraat by a secessionist group called “Adat Jesurun,” the first Jews to break away from the Ashkenazi community due to an internal conflict over the extensive power of the *parnasim*.<sup>152</sup> Both of these small synagogues existed only briefly as they lost their independence during the Napoleonic period in the early 1800s, when Napoleon ordered the centralization of Jewish congregations. The third synagogue, located at the Uilenburgerstraat, had initially belonged to “Hagnosas Kallo,” a society that provided girls from poor Jewish families with a modest dowry. It was taken over by the Ashkenazi community in the 1730s, which tore down the old house and erected a new building that offered space for 568 men and 43 women.

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<sup>151</sup> This synagogue actually dated back to the middle of the 1600s, when the Ashkenazi community first built a small shul on the second floor of three adjoining residences. After the inauguration of the Great Shul, this building lost its purpose and for the next decades served among others as a stable for horses and stagecoaches. In the 1760s the building was again reconstructed for use by the burial society. The shul was used until 1928 and torn down in 1959.

<sup>152</sup> Adat Jesurun, also known as the Naie Kille or New Community, consisted of a small number of Maskilim who were in favor of the French Revolution and highly critical of the “tyranny” of the *Parnasim*. They demanded among others the abolition of the *parnasim*, democratic elections and communal improvements (especially with regard to the sale of kosher meat). They seceded from the community in the 1797 and convened for services in one of its members’ home. Two years later they held services at a synagogue in the Rapenburgerstreet, in the middle of the Jewish neighborhood. This congregation remained very small and was forced to reunite with the larger community under Napoleonic rule in 1807.

As for Berlin, it would take until the late 1840s and early 1850s before the Jewish community there expanded and renovated the Heidereutergasse synagogue and submitted a request to the Prussian *Ministerium des Innern* to build a new communal synagogue – the reasons for this “delay” will become clear in chapter five. While Jews elsewhere in Germany initiated new building plans in the eighteenth century, the Berlin Gemeinde had to wait until 1866 before it could inaugurate the spectacular Oranienburgerstraße synagogue. For long the Berlin Jewish community had been marginal compared to that of London and Amsterdam, and the city at large had figured less prominently on the tourist map of European travelers – which explains the comparatively small number of travel accounts and descriptions of Berlin houses of worship. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, this was no longer the case: the Prussian metropolis had arrived on the urban scene.

## **Conclusion**

Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, north European cities underwent profound socio-economic, political, and demographic changes. While Amsterdam had already transformed into a world city during its Golden Age, London surpassed it in size and economic vitality in the early eighteenth century. Berlin, a modest garrison town of 55,000 in the early 1700s, began to claim an important place on Europe’s map as the center of Prussian power and culture. Synagogues, which served as signifiers of urban Jewry’s place and participation in Christian society, moved along with these currents of change. Their presence within the cityscape, their designs, and the reactions they produced among gentile observers tell us a great deal about whether Jews

felt at home and how they were perceived by the Christian community. Under the influence of absolutism and its mercantilist policies, and later on under the influence of the enlightenment, synagogues in the early modern period transformed from hidden and private rooms into public, respectable, free-standing buildings. While “of-the-street synagogues”<sup>153</sup> located in private houses did not disappear in these three north-European cities – secessionist groups or recent immigrants continued to congregate in such spaces – they no longer defined the norm. They resulted more from financial limitations than from a reluctance to announce visually their place of worship to the public.

Advancement in synagogue architecture, however, did not necessarily mean advancement in legal status or the elimination of restrictions. In Berlin the death of the Prussian Elector Frederick Wilhelm, who had granted the small Jewish community an unusual number of privileges and who had allowed the construction of the Heidereutergasse synagogue, led to the re-introduction of a myriad of Jewish decrees. Jews, for instance, continued to be limited in their mobility as they could enter and leave the city only through two gates – the Brandenburg and Rosenthal gates – for which they paid a fee. Privileges to build, trade, and worship were continuously granted and withdrawn, rendering the status of Jews a constant subject of concern and public discourse. This inconsistency regarding the status of the Jews only reaffirmed their separateness in Prussian society – something that would become abundantly clear in nineteenth-century debates over what constituted *Deutschtum* and *Judentum*.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Michael A. Meyer, 158.

<sup>154</sup> Reinhard Rürup argues in a 1969 essay that this very inconsistency was one of the main factors for the intensity of the Jewish Question that arose in the nineteenth-century Germany: “As a result of gradual abolition,” he writes, “the very segregation that it sets out to liquidate is confirmed in all the spheres in which it has not yet been abolished and the new greater freedom redoubles the attention focused on the remaining restrictions, so that gradual abolition militates against itself.” Most Germans, in other words,

Permission to expand the existing building or to add a new prayer house was repeatedly denied in an attempt to constrain the growth of the population. Berlin Jews generally prospered despite the city's stringent *Judenstättigkeit*, but they were forced to return to praying in private rooms once the community began to grow. The Heidereutergasse synagogue almost seems to have been a mistake, a temporary lull in an otherwise consistent anti-Jewish disposition that permitted free worship, but that remained very reluctant to allow Jews to do so in public. Still, Berlin Jewry enjoyed more privileges than many Jews elsewhere in Germany. They were not confined to living in a ghetto, such as in Frankfurt, or at the very outskirts of town. As Baron von Riesbeck reports, they lived among gentiles and shared their public space. Their synagogues, however, as the Berlin Jews themselves, remained restricted. It should therefore come as no surprise that this urban community took every opportunity to build on a monumental scale when it was finally permitted to do so, and that it partook fully in the massive building programs of the second half of the nineteenth century.

The situation was quite different in London and Amsterdam. While only 2,220 Jews called Berlin their home in the mid-1770s – more than 80 percent of the Jews living in German-speaking lands still lived in the countryside – in England and Holland the vast majority of Jews lived in its capitals. These were places of diverse populations in which the Jews were only one of many religious minorities, and one that was not perceived as posing a particular threat to the Christian faith – Catholicism, rather than Judaism, stirred up intense emotions in both places. Legislation regarding the Jews did exist, but it was comparatively mild and often fell under the same “rubric” as that of the Quakers,

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continued to look at Jews as exceptions. See Reinhard Rürup, “The Jewish Emancipation and Bourgeois Society,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 14 (1969), 67-91.

Catholics, and Mennonites. Many discriminatory laws also disappeared over the course of the eighteenth century. London Jewry thus could not build on public streets in the late 1600s and early 1700s, but neither could other non-Anglican groups. Jews, as were Dissenters and Roman Catholics, were excluded from political life and the universities in England, not because they were Jews per se, contends Todd Endelman, but because they were not Anglicans.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Mokum's Jews were initially forbidden bell-towers, but considering the fact they were allowed to erect the largest synagogue of its time on a prominent site, that was a small price to pay.

As opposed to Berlin, these cities were also heavily involved in maritime trade and relatively tolerant of immigrant groups who could contribute to their mission. Gentiles certainly recognized the disproportionate number of Jews who were involved in commerce, but this was a profession that was neither considered immoral nor disrespectful. On the contrary, both metropolises owed their growth and prosperity to commercial enterprise. London and Amsterdam, in short, provided a milieu that did not fervently oppose public worship and the building of beautiful synagogues. Dutch and English gentiles, even if they did not care for Jews, generally just let them be. Most would sooner shrug their shoulders than point an accusing finger. There were organized efforts to convert the Jews to Christianity through missionary activity, particularly during the late 1700s and early 1800s when England witnessed the growth of Evangelicalism, but most of these efforts failed miserably. Both cities had lacked the presence of an organized Jewish community for centuries, and had failed to let a deep-seated antisemitic tradition take root. While anti-Jewish rhetoric and complaints were certainly not uncommon, and while social discrimination remained a fact, these never evolved into

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<sup>155</sup> Endelman, 45.



widespread demonization and persistent legal discrimination. Our travelers tell us they oftentimes found synagogue services impious and uncivilized, but these conclusions oftentimes sprung from their unfamiliarity with Jewish customs and not necessarily from an antisemitic disposition.

Synagogues, in this context, were able to evolve from small private rooms into public buildings with a dignified exterior, elaborate window arrangements, and improved seating for women. They occupied a firm position in the urban landscape, although in London they remained somewhat more in the background than in the Dutch capital. And because they were conspicuously present in Holland, they became a familiar part of the urban fabric and a common sight to see. While the majority of gentiles never stepped inside a synagogue, and while some undoubtedly grumbled about them to others, they grew increasingly accustomed to these religious edifices. The element of surprise, in other words, which played an important role in the process of interpretation among visitors, weakened for those observers who had matured in a relatively tolerant and cosmopolitan culture. We might say that architecture served in this case as a tool for progress as the rich assortment of religious structures in the urban landscape – Jewish as well as Lutheran, Quaker, Calvinist, Arminian, Dutch Reformed, Greek Orthodox, and later on also Catholic – familiarized city-dwellers with the public presence of religious Others. The prominent synagogues in Holland to which people were exposed therefore expanded, rather than tested, the limits of toleration. This was somewhat less the case for London, where synagogues were not considered a tourist site and remained underneath the radar, especially as the city enticed gentiles to visit its new attractions, such as the British Museum or Ranelagh Gardens.

The majority of Londoners and Amsterdammers who wrote about synagogues in the early modern period found the Jews a peculiar bunch whom they preferred to see converted. Many authors linked Jews and their synagogues with noise and disorder, perpetuating already existing notions of Jews as “wild” and “uncivilized.”<sup>156</sup> They did not, however, vilify them. German travelers responded differently. Their perspectives were shaped by a society that generally cast a suspicious eye to its Jewish populace and that singled them out through special legislation. For these observers the disconnect between elegant architecture and Jews, whether in Amsterdam, London, or Berlin, remained a source of wonder. Johann Jacob Schudt thus could not hide his amazement at the Esnoga and the Great Synagogue, angrily accusing the Dutch authorities of choosing commercial profit over the Christian faith. Many German travelogues continued to refer to the Jews as the “enemies of Christ,” as dirty and immoral, and as untrustworthy. German authors were hardly unique in this – accounts from French and Italian travelers reveal similar sentiments.<sup>157</sup> It is the Dutch and British dispositions, rather, that were

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<sup>156</sup> Charles Burney, who visited the Amsterdam synagogues in October 1772, reports that “three of the sweet singers of Israel, which, it seems, are famous here, and much attended to by Christians as well as Jews, began singing a kind of jolly modern melody . . . At the end of each strain, the whole congregation set up such a kind of cry, as a pack of hounds when a fox breaks cover. It was a confused clamour, and riotous noise, more than song or prayer.” See Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces. Or, the Journal of a Tour through those Countries, undertaken to collect Materials for a General History of Music* (London: printed for T. Becket, J. Robson, and G. Robinson, 1775), 229-230. Wendeborn, too, associates Jews with noise several times. He compares the noises heard in English public schools with “the appearance of a Jewish synagogue,” and “the loud repeating of the Litany, the Creed, and other parts of the service” at an Episcopal Church to the scenes of “a Jewish synagogue” (128).

<sup>157</sup> See, for instance, Giuseppe Marco Antonio Baretta, *A journey from London to Genoa, through England, Portugal, Spain, and France. By Joseph Baretta . . . In two volumes* (London: printed for T. Davies and L. Davies, 1770); Eduard van Biema, “Een reis door Holland in 1747,” *Oud-Holland: Nieuwe Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Kunst, Letterkunde, Nijverheid, enz.* (vol. 28, 1910), 77-92; Edmondo de Amicis, *Holland and its People* [1880], translated from the Italian by Caroline Tilton (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1972). John Ferrar referred to Jews as cursed, as “the scattered, despised Jews, the irreconcilable enemies of the Christians” in his *Tour from Dublin to London, in 1795, through the Isle of Anglesea, Bangor, Conway, . . . and Kensington* (Dublin, 1796), 34. John Motley, too, called Jews “the enemy to the Christian religion” (408), while John Moore referred to the Jews of Frankfurt as “black cattle” (419).

untypical at this time, reflecting the unusual milieu in which their Jewish populations lived.

This does not mean that the relatively liberal views concerning the Jews were shared by *all* Dutch or British travelers or that none of the German observers had an open mind about the presence of Jewish religious architecture. The responses examined here are not conclusive, nor do they necessarily represent public opinion. Most tourist guides and travelogues were written by the well-to-do, which means that the average English bloke might have despised the Jews in London and might have considered Bevis Marks a blasphemy. Tolerance in Britain and Holland, after all, had its roots in economic pragmatism and not in a fundamental belief in the virtues of religious pluralism – something that became particularly visible in the social sphere as Jews were at times excluded from social clubs. It is, however, safe to say that the Prussian climate in which Jews built their synagogues differed substantially from that of Britain and Holland, and that German attitudes and responses patterns to synagogues therefore deviated from those exhibited in the capitals west of them. In all three north-European cities, however, improving conditions for the Jews – whether temporary or permanent – allowed for the evolution and experimentation of synagogue architecture, which would reach a new phase with the massive building programs in all of Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. Let us turn to the first case study, Amsterdam.

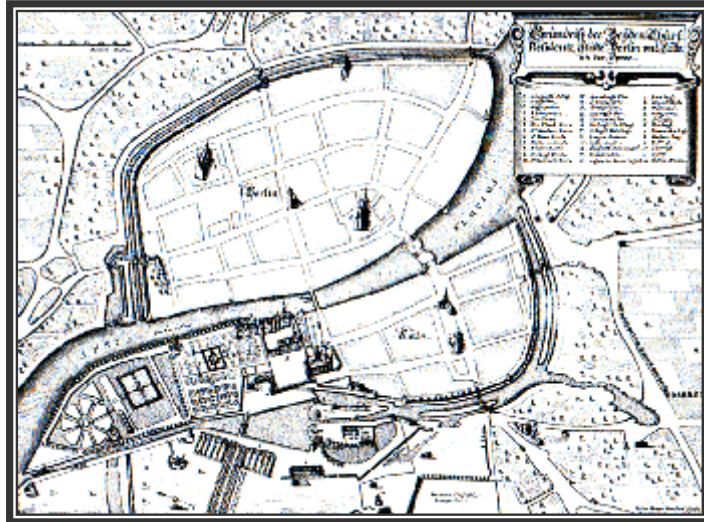


Fig. 2: Map of Berlin and Cöln, 1648

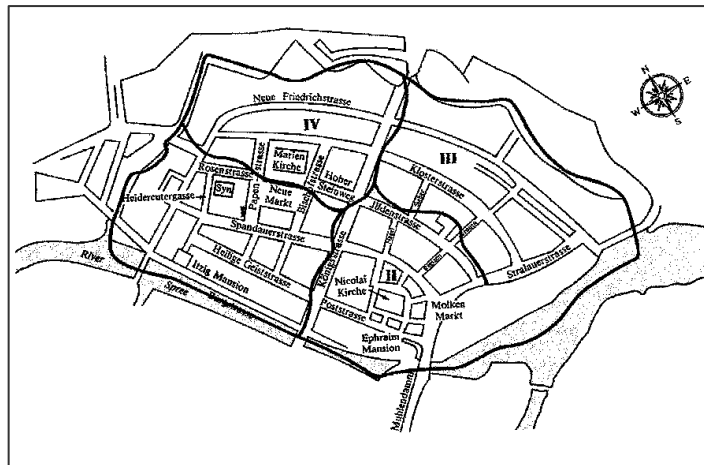


Fig. 3: Alt Berlin in the Eighteenth Century

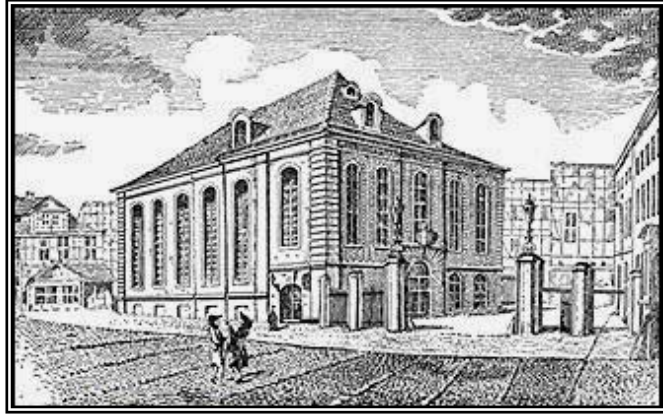


Fig. 4: Heideuteurgasse Synagogue  
Source: The Jewish Encyclopedia

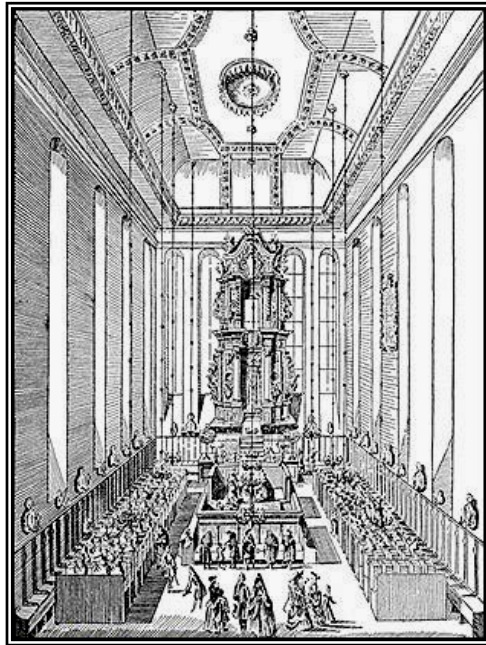


Fig. 5: Interior Heideuteurgasse Synagogue  
Source: The Jewish Encyclopedia



Fig. 6: Houtgracht Synagogue Amsterdam  
Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 7: German-Jewish Synagogue Amsterdam (1671)  
Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam

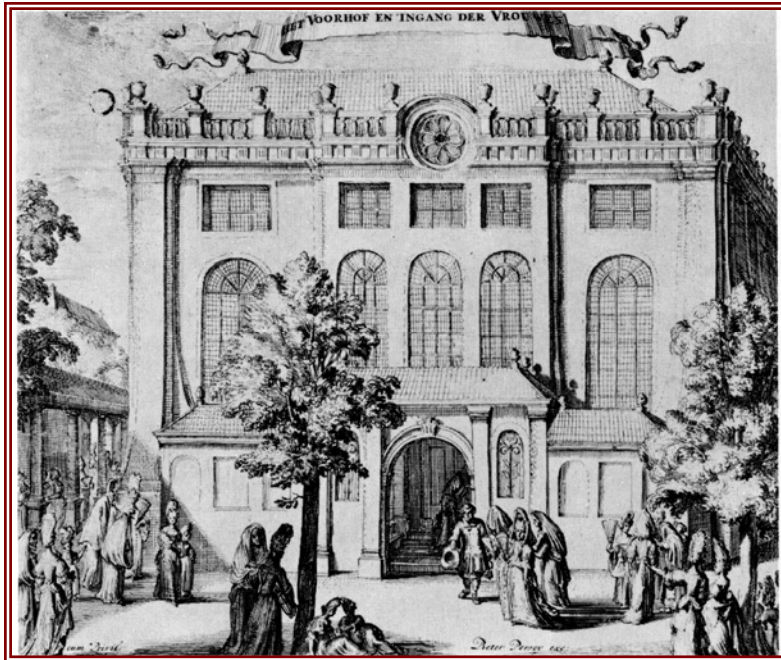


Fig. 8: Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue Amsterdam (1675)  
Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 9: The Jewish Neighborhood in Amsterdam  
Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 10: The Esnoga  
Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 11: Interior the Esnoga, by Romeyn de Hooghe  
Source: Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam



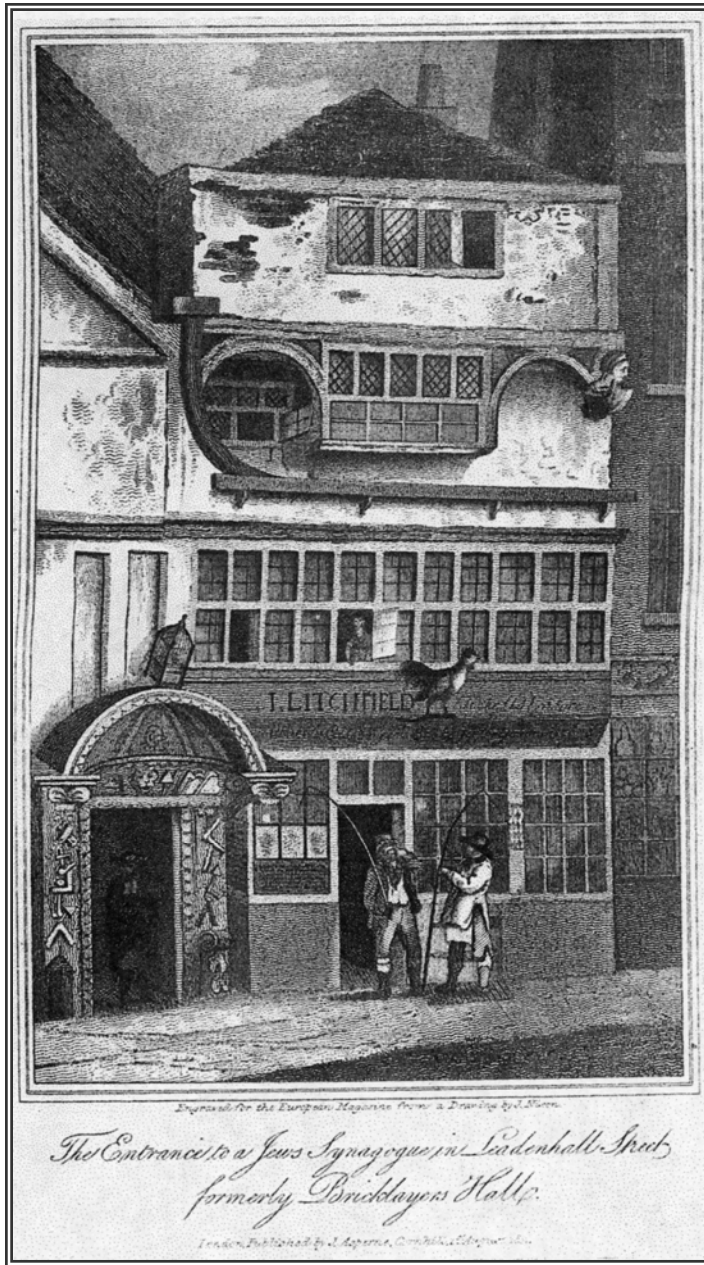


Fig. 12: Entrance to the Synagogue in Leadenhall Street  
Source: *European Magazine* (1811)



Fig. 13: The Great Synagogue in 1809, London  
From Ackerman's *Microcosm of London*

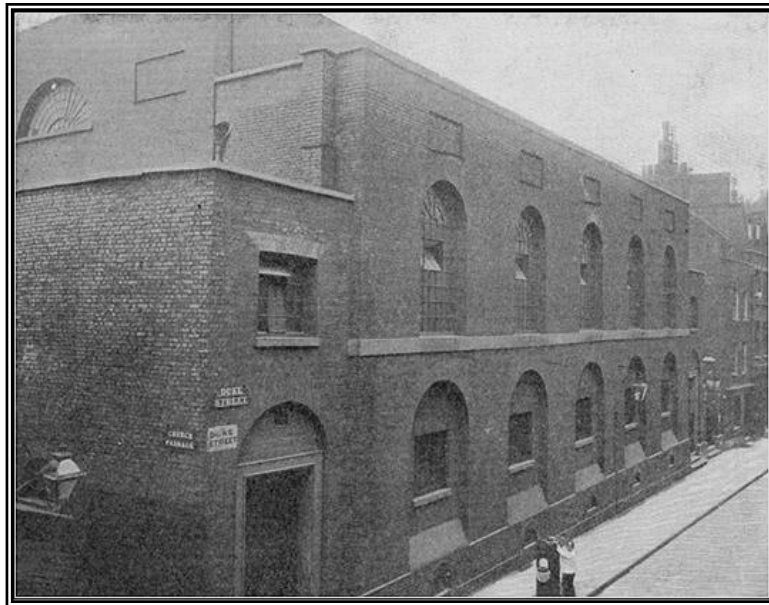


Fig. 14: The Great Synagogue, London  
Source: The Jewish Encyclopedia

## Chapter III

### From *Café-Chantant* to Jewish House of Worship: Amsterdam Synagogues in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

On December 10, 1880, a Dutch Jew by the name of S. Rose sent an angry letter to the *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* (New Jewish Weekly, *NIW*), in which he commented on the “abnormality” that the Amsterdam Jewish community had not witnessed the building of any new synagogues during the nineteenth century. “It is without precedent in the history of the Jews,” stated Rose, “that in one and the same place a hundred and fifty years have passed without the emergence of a new synagogue. Only here, in the famous Amsterdam orthodox community, where the number of Jews has doubled, does this abnormality exist . . . Is there really anybody who still doubts our need for a large prayer house?” Comparing the state of affairs in the Dutch capital to that of other European cities, Rose became even more agitated. “In London,” he wrote,

where the Jewish population is smaller than it is here, handsome buildings have emerged in a variety of neighborhoods, which are heated during the winter and very comfortable . . . Berlin, in addition to the existing synagogues, has erected a beautiful building, richly decorated on the inside and outside, that is considered one of the most attractive public buildings in the city. . . Vienna, Turin, Leipzig, Frankfurt, Liverpool, Manchester . . . all have considerable buildings worthy of God. Only Amsterdam has remained unchanged for a hundred and fifty years!<sup>1</sup>

Rose was responding to an article that had appeared in the *NIW* a few weeks earlier, reporting a meeting of the Amsterdam parnasim about the annual budget. At this meeting

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<sup>1</sup> S. Rose, “Een nieuwe synagoge,” *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 16: 22 (10 December, 1880): 3. On the same day the very same letter appeared in another Jewish weekly, the *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 6: 24 (10 December, 1880): 3. Ph. Elte, the main editor of the *NIW*, responded that Rose was incorrect here since one of the city’s synagogues, the Rapenburger Street Synagogue, was less than a hundred years old. Rose replied in kind by arguing that this building originally belonged to a secessionist community and was “inherited” by the main Amsterdam kehilla only after Napoleon forced them to reconcile.

one of the members, M. de Vries, had raised the question of building a new synagogue for the Jewish population. He no longer found it acceptable that large numbers of Jews had to gather in locations of “highly suspicious moral reputation” during the High Holidays due to the lack of space in the community synagogues. It was a “sad phenomenon indeed,” argued de Vries, that those Jews, “who had been cheering on women singing immoral songs” only hours before had to pray solemnly to God in the very same space after it was transformed from a café-chantant into a temporary prayer room.<sup>2</sup> De Vries’s comments, however, did not spark any real interest among the other parnasim. While they agreed that the situation was not perfect, they expressed concern about the kehilla’s dire financial situation due to the large number of Jewish poor and moved on to the next point on the agenda. Frustrated by this missed opportunity, Rose picked up his pen and responded that

the lack of funds was an illusion. The Englishman says “where there’s a will there’s a way”. . . Isn’t it an insult to our community that we continue to maintain there are no means at all to build one or more synagogues? . . . If our Talmudists are right by saying that “taking care of the poor is as difficult as the passing through the Red Sea” – well, Holland has reclaimed the Haarlemmer Lake and is talking of reclaiming the Zuider Sea. Can’t we Jews then claim a synagogue?<sup>3</sup>

Rose’s comments, as well as the response of the parnasim, represent in a nutshell Amsterdam’s unusual position in the second half of the nineteenth century with regard to synagogue building. The community, which contained a surprisingly large contingent of poor working-class Jews, was not particularly well-off and simply could not afford to build a large synagogue. The cost of poor relief, which had increased substantially during the 1860s, had financially strained the community. In particular, the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, which temporarily halted the diamond and cigar trades,

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<sup>2</sup> “Een nieuwe synagogue,” *NIW* 16: 18 (12 November, 1880): 1. The *NIW*, founded by Meyer Roest in 1865, became and remained the most important and most widely read Dutch-Jewish weekly.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, 3.

contributed to what one letter writer described as “poverty here, poverty there, poverty everywhere.”<sup>4</sup> Building a monumental synagogue was consequently not a high priority.

Moreover, the shortage of space to which de Vries alluded was not a year-round problem. As more and more Jews in Amsterdam became alienated from traditional Judaism, due to increasing acculturation and secularization, many visited the synagogue only on the High Holidays, during which temporary spaces were used. For much of the year, it was argued, a costly new building would remain half-empty, as in Berlin, “where the majority of the community shines by absence.”<sup>5</sup> Lastly, the existing synagogues, many of which dated from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, required expensive repairs and maintenance, most of which consumed the annual building budget.

However, Rose’s comments also suggest that community leaders were not particularly eager even to consider the idea of building a structure similar to those being built in other European cities, even if they had the means to do so. When financial conditions improved temporarily during the *Kaapse Tijd* (Cape Era)<sup>6</sup>, no initiatives were taken, although the community borrowed money to finance the building of a new hospital and to support religious education for the poor. “[W]hat will keep Israel’s faith intact,” wrote the *Jewish Weekly* in 1882, “is religious instruction . . . not beautiful synagogues, not melodious cantors, not even an articulate orator will be capable of upholding our religion if it is deprived of religious education.”<sup>7</sup> The lack of interest in monumental synagogues echoed in the Jewish press as well, which printed little about newly

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<sup>4</sup> “Een harde les!,” *NIW* 6: 29 (10 February, 1871): 1.

<sup>5</sup> Letter signed by X.Y.Z. to the *NIW* 17: 9 (9 September, 1881): 3.

<sup>6</sup> The *Kaapse Tijd* refers to the period between 1871 and 1876, when large amounts of raw diamonds were discovered in South Africa and brought to Amsterdam to be cut, polished, and made into jewelry. It was a period of unprecedented growth in the city’s diamond industry and attracted large numbers of Jewish and non-Jewish workers. An economic crisis and the ceaseless supply of laborers ended this “golden era.”

<sup>7</sup> “Feestelijke inwijding van het nieuwe gebouw van Talmoed Tora,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 27: 48 (26 May, 1882): 1.

constructed buildings – the 1866 inauguration of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue in Berlin, for instance, received only a few lines in the foreign news sections of several Jewish newspapers. To community officials, constructing an imposing new synagogue seemed rather pointless, in good as well as in bad times. In short, finding “a way” to build new synagogues was difficult, especially when there was even less of a “will” to do so.

While Amsterdam Jews refrained from building a monumental synagogue, they did create new hevra synagogues, i.e., small and unimposing houses of prayer that generally functioned independently from the main Jewish community. While the founding of hevrot was officially forbidden,<sup>8</sup> Jewish officials reluctantly condoned their existence as they provided a much-needed service that the community could not provide. For instance, the *NIW*, the mouthpiece of Dutch Jewry, reported on the inauguration of these synagogues – the majority of which were not purpose-built structures – although the short notices merely described in neutral tone the events and refrained from presenting any editorial comments. When the number of hevra synagogues in the Jewish neighborhood surpassed fifteen, the main editor of the *NIW*, Philip Elte, did address the “hevra-problem,” which supposedly undermined the unity of the Jewish community and had a negative effect on its annual revenue. His complaints, however, must have fallen on deaf ears, since hevra synagogues continued to thrive in Amsterdam, and would increase in number even more over the course of the 1880s and 1890s.

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<sup>8</sup> Jewish community officials generally forbade the establishment of independent religious societies, as it undermined central control and decreased communal revenue. Phyllis Cohen Albert has shown that in France Jewish leaders’ aggressive crack-down on both hevrot and minyanim had the enthusiastic support of the state. In Holland, however, the existence of hevrot was frowned upon, but no action was taken – neither by Jewish leadership nor by the state – to eliminate them. See Phyllis Cohen Albert, *The Modernization of French Jewry: Consistory and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Brandeis University Press, 1977).

The following pages will elaborate on the conversation initiated by Rose and Elte concerning Amsterdam's synagogues and will explore why the Dutch capital was unusual in the larger European framework – so unusual, in fact, that it was the opposite of other European capitals. While Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and even St. Petersburg entered a new stage in synagogue building with monumental, free-standing landmarks, Amsterdam – which built such synagogues in the seventeenth century – followed a different trajectory by reverting back to building small and rather unremarkable structures located in the center of the old Jewish neighborhood. Before we get to this point, however, we need to gain a better understanding of the wider context in which Dutch Jewry lived and built, and it is to this context that we will now turn.

### **“That Dead City on the Zuider Sea”**

Over the course of the nineteenth century, many of Europe's major cities underwent a process of large-scale development. Old districts were demolished to make room for broad boulevards, large department stores, factories and warehouses. Medieval fortifications that had once served to protect the population, but that now obstructed the city's expansion, were dismantled and replaced by parks and playgrounds, beyond which new residential districts arose with better, “healthier” housing.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the growing belief that the roots of urban society's persistent problems – urban delinquency, drinking, gambling – could be found in poor living conditions, and that an improved environment would transform “uncivilized” city-dwellers into moral individuals loyal to the state,

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<sup>9</sup> Rob Pistor, *A City in Progress: Physical Planning in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening Amsterdam, 1994), 34.

stimulated urban renewal efforts in metropolitan cities across Europe in the last decades of the 1800s.

In Amsterdam these developments took place somewhat later. In the 1850s the Dutch capital was still a poor city, in part due to measures taken under French rule fifty years earlier and to the late arrival of industrialization. Europe's revolutionary years had been disastrous for Holland's overseas trade, especially when it became more deeply involved in the struggle between France and Britain. As part of the anti-revolutionary alliance against France, Holland voluntarily gave up control over its colonies in the East and West to England, which agreed to temporarily administer affairs abroad at a steep price, causing Holland to lose one of its primary sources of revenue. The situation worsened after Napoleon imposed limitations on Dutch sea trade under the Continental System, which plunged Holland into a long-term economic recession. It would take decades to recover, and Holland consequently did not witness the transformations spawned by modern industrial innovations until the 1870s and 1880s – a century after England.

At mid-century, then, Amsterdam was poorly equipped to promote urban growth. “The servicing of local debts, the need to provide charitable institutions for the relief of the poor, low income tax for the well-to-do and fraudulent practices in tax collection,” contends Arnold van der Valk, “kept the city of Amsterdam in a state of semi-bankruptcy.”<sup>10</sup> Since the city lacked spacious boulevards, glamorous hotels, and attractive museums, it failed to meet the standards that contemporaries believed a modern metropolis should have. Foreign travelers who visited Amsterdam in the 1850s thus could

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<sup>10</sup> Arnold van der Valk, “Amsterdam in aanleg: Planvorming en dagelijks handelen 1850-1900” (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Amsterdam, 14 April 1989), 562. See also A. van Hulzen, *Een halve eeuw van vooruitgang, 1850-1900* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1971).



not hide their amazement when confronted with windmills, picturesque canals, and dilapidated housing, which had once been signs of economic progress and “modern” life but were now testimony to the city’s sluggishness. They witnessed the closing of the city gates at night, the lighting of street lanterns by hand, and the towing of boats by horses. Seen as a dormant place, a curiosity compared to London and Paris, one French traveler referred to Amsterdam as “that dead city on the Zuider Sea,”<sup>11</sup> a sentiment that was widely shared not only by tourists, but by natives as well. As late as 1875 the weekly periodical *De Opmerker* [The Observer] remarked that “each year many Dutch tourists visit foreign capitals. Even the lower classes eagerly make cheap train trips abroad, and they can hardly fail to notice that everything they see there makes an immensely better impression than anything at home.”<sup>12</sup> The Dutch politician Johan Rudolf Thorbecke (1798-1873) agreed and remarked that “if Amsterdam is supposed to be the heart of the Netherlands, well, then it has a rather faint heart beat.”<sup>13</sup>

The 1870s, however, marked a turning point in the city’s history. After the Liberals came to power in 1867, they initiated a number of large-scale projects to modernize the city’s port facilities, waterways, and arterial roads. Funded by loans three times the annual revenue of the city,<sup>14</sup> these new public works stimulated local industries and slowly began to pull Amsterdam out of economic stagnation. The North Sea Canal, completed in 1876, was decisive to the city’s revival, as was the construction of the Central Station in the late 1880s. Nineteenth-century colonial imperialism, too, generated

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<sup>11</sup> Pistor, 34. Unfortunately the author does not give any additional information on this French traveler.

<sup>12</sup> “Iets over bouwkunst,” *De Opmerker: Weekblad voor architecten, ingenieurs, fabrikanten, aannemers en werkbazen* 10: 29 (18 July, 1875).

<sup>13</sup> Johan Rudolph Thorbecke, who was the author of the Dutch constitution of 1848, is quoted in the 1875 edition of *Amsterdam en de Amsterdammers, door een Amsterdammer* (Deventer: A. J. van den Sigtenhorst, 1875), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Van der Valk, 562.

new profits, most of which were invested in infrastructure and urban expansion. This renewed prosperity, accompanied by significant population growth<sup>15</sup>, gave rise to a spate of building initiatives. Indeed, it was the first time since the 1680s that Amsterdam expanded beyond the Singelgracht, the old moat around the city that for centuries formed the boundary around the old center, and that its well-known “half moon” shaped structure received new additions (fig. 1).<sup>16</sup>

The so-called *revolutiebouw*,<sup>17</sup> or building revolution, that followed Amsterdam’s revitalization raised questions among architects, city planners, and local authorities alike regarding style and aesthetic representation. The *Opmerker* wrote in 1876 that the art of building became a topic of public debate: “architecture and style are discussed so frequently nowadays – not least amongst laymen – that it is becoming quite the fashion. So much so that the professional architect can only wonder what the future holds for the building profession in this country.”<sup>18</sup> Building periodicals such as *De Opmerker* or *Bouwkundig Weekblad* [Architectural Weekly] frequently asked “How should we

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<sup>15</sup> While in 1811 the population of Amsterdam decreased to approximately 200,000, in 1869 this number had risen to 264,700, and by 1899 it topped the half million mark. Not merely the development of industry, but improved public health and lower death rates too contributed to this population increase. See Audrey M. Lambert, *The Making of the Dutch Landscape: An Historical Geography of the Netherlands* (London: Academic Press, 1985), 224.

<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that the land outside of the city boundaries remained unused. Residential homes and bars, for instance, were built, as were windmills and large summer homes alongside the canals for the wealthy. However, as Arnold van der Valk explains, the land use outside of the city’s seventeenth-century fortifications was subject to constant change and did not become part of the city’s main structure until permanent neighborhoods arose after the 1860s. The city’s lay-out thus remained unchanged for nearly 200 years. See van der Valk, 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Revolutiebouw* refers to the uncontrolled wave of construction outside of the old city limits that began in 1870s. Much of this building was uncontrolled by the local authorities and oftentimes produced monotonous, unplanned quarters with large blocks of four or five-story dwellings. Many of these homes, writes Audrey Lambert, sprang up with little regard to amenity, hygiene, or traffic requirements. This quick and usually cheap form of building led to a doubling in the number of residential homes between 1870 and 1890. See Lambert, 284; Rijkscommissie voor Monumentenzorg, *Jongere Bouwkunst: Amsterdam binnen de Singelgracht (1850-1940). Advies van de Rijkscommissie voor de Monumentenzorg, afdeling II van de Monumentenraad, inzake de inventarisatie en selectie van jongere bouwkunst* (’s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> “Onze oudheid-manie,” *De Opmerker* 11: 30 (23 July 1876): 1.

build?,” inviting professionals to share their views on the most appropriate and representative architectural designs for Amsterdam and for Holland at large. While builders were loyal to neo-classical forms for most of the nineteenth century – not merely because of its aesthetic appeal but also because of its associations with democracy, citizenship, and moral principles – the last quarter of the century witnessed renewed interest in the Dutch national “character” and an expansion of artistic possibilities.<sup>19</sup> Gothic and Renaissance-inspired buildings emerged, as did highly eclectic structures that combined Greek, Baroque, Renaissance, and Byzantine ornament, such as the city’s central station and national museum, both of which blended Gothic and Dutch Renaissance elements. The Italian traveler Edmondo de Amicis, who visited Amsterdam in 1880, was not exaggerating when he observed that “[u]nder the most capricious of skies dwell the least capricious of peoples; and this solid, resolute, and orderly race has the most helter-skelter and disorderly architecture that can be seen in the world.”<sup>20</sup>

The hodgepodge of architectural styles that began to dot Amsterdam’s landscape, however, had a clear ideological dimension. Gothic was used mainly by Roman Catholics, an increasingly vocal and visible religious minority in Dutch society at this time. Many Catholic architects, such as Pierre J. H. Cuypers, applied the Gothic style to make manifest their collective ideals, both in sacred and in secular architecture. From their perspective, art was to serve the church, which meant that the architect was not granted artistic liberty and should at all times follow the principles of church, i.e., Gothic,

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<sup>19</sup> This preference for classical forms grew not merely from the nineteenth-century *Zeitgeist*, which considered classical forms the most appropriate for its belief in progress, education, and democracy; it was also a product of the conservative tendencies prevalent in art schools and architectural institutes, which attached great value to the classics. See *Jongere Bouwkunst*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Edmondo de Amicis, *Holland and its People*, translated by Caroline Tilton (Freeport: Books for Library Press, 1972 [1880]), 80.

design. The neo-Renaissance “camp”<sup>21</sup> shared the Catholic commitment to community, but its loyalties were not religious but nationalist in nature. The neo-Renaissance style, which evoked the Dutch Republic’s Golden Age, was considered a highly appropriate representation of Dutch national character, of a kingdom free of foreign influence that once again was growing and prosperous. The use of red and yellow brick made from Dutch clay fostered an independence from foreign materials and contributed to the appeal of neo-Renaissance design. These cultural nationalists, contends the Dutch art historian Auke van der Woud, expressed the growing desire among architects and urban planners to create an authentic Dutch landscape.<sup>22</sup>

A third ideological strain rejected the uniformity of Gothic and neo-Renaissance forms and favored instead an eclectic approach to architecture, one that reflected the pluralism, individualism, and complexities of the modern age. From the eclectics’ point of view, the artist should not be restricted to any aesthetic orthodoxy, but should be free to combine different elements in order to create an original work of art. According to the architect Johannes H. Leliman (1828-1910), the eclectics “reject[ed] unconditional obedience or subjection to any rule whatsoever. Their principle [was] that any form can be useful, but that no particular form can be universally applied.”<sup>23</sup> Leliman and his followers, contends van der Woud, viewed society not as a collective entity, but as “a

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<sup>21</sup> See Auke van der Woud, *The Art of Building: From Classicism to Modernity. The Dutch Architectural Debate 1840-1990* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 58; Bernard Colenbrander, *Stijl: norm en handschrift in de Nederlandse architectuur van de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Rotterdam: NAI Uitgevers, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> J. H. Leliman, “Iets over den bouwstijl van de Amsterdamsche woonhuizen van de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw, naar aanleiding van de slooping en den herbouw van het koffijhuis: ‘Het Vosje,’ op het Rokin te Amsterdam,” *Bouwkundige Bijdragen* 11 (1860): 429.

collection of individuals with some basic collective interests.”<sup>24</sup> They argued that society was growing increasingly pluriform and individualistic. Consequently, the eclectics did not consider architecture an instrument in the service of a higher political or religious ideal, a tool for the moral improvement of man, but viewed it instead as an expression of artistic liberty in an increasingly complex age. These three competing factions on the Dutch architectural scene, in short, used aesthetic forms as a means to promote their ideological positions. What has been referred to as the “battle of styles” thus revolved around more than aesthetic preferences; it reflected a power struggle over the definition and representation of Dutch national character.<sup>25</sup>

Thus when Amsterdam Jews initiated new building projects, such as the Jewish hospital (1884), the Beth Midrash (1883), or the Gerard Dou Synagogue (1892) – a hevre synagogue that will be discussed in detail below – they needed to choose among several available styles, each of which contained an ideological component. While an exclusively Gothic-inspired structure was unappealing to Jews due to its close connection to Catholicism, the neo-Renaissance and eclectic forms were viable options. The majority of Jews in Amsterdam, after all, shared the cultural nationalists’ memory of the Golden Age – a period in which the Jewish community had thrived – and they considered themselves citizens loyal to the Dutch state. Moreover, neo-Renaissance architecture was relatively

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<sup>24</sup> Van der Woud, 58. See also her short article “Architectuur voor een nieuwe geschiedenis,” in *Bouwmeesters van Amsterdam: G. B. Salm & Salm GBzn.*, edited by Janjaap Kuyt, Norbert Middelkoop, and Auke van der Woud (Amsterdam: Gemeentearchief, 1997), 8-13.

<sup>25</sup> These ideological divisions existed not merely in the domain of architecture, but suffused Dutch society. In fact, it is this period that witnessed the *verzuiling*, or “pillarization,” of the Dutch religious, political, and social landscape, which would last until the 1960s. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Liberals and Social Democrats gradually organized into distinct segments (pillars), each with their own social institutions, political party, schools, newspapers, unions, and recreational services. Dutch Jewry in many ways resembled these pillars, but it was both too small in number and too loyal to the Liberals to form a pillar of its own. Good observations of Dutch pillarization are offered by Joris van Eijnatten, in his introduction to *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Harry Post, *Pillarization: An Analysis of Dutch and Belgian Society* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1989).

inexpensive due to its use of domestic materials that did not require plastering, which neo-classical buildings did. However, Jews could also appreciate the eclectic approach, especially as it allowed for features that revealed the “Jewishness” of the building.<sup>26</sup> The Jewish community, as a result, applied both architectural styles during the second half of the nineteenth century. What ultimately determined the choice between the two were the function and location of the building under consideration, the preference of the architect, and the budget for the construction project.

In contrast to Germany and England, the Moorish style enjoyed a minor presence in Holland at this time and was used only for ornamental form in eclectic compositions. Although it was occasionally applied in synagogogue design in other Dutch cities – Moorish-inspired synagogues emerged in Eindhoven (1866), Tilburg (1873), Groningen (1906), and Nijmegen (1912) – in Amsterdam Moorish elements appeared only sporadically in exterior displays and somewhat more frequently in interior designs. This lukewarm interest in Moorish features was also linked to the socio-economic and political position of the Jews of Amsterdam, which discouraged its application on a wider scale. The following pages will explore this in further detail and will focus in particular on the relationship between the status of Amsterdam Jewry and its conversations about synagogues.

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<sup>26</sup> “Character” was one of the buzzwords in nineteenth-century architectural discourse. To the architect Johannes Leliman character was “what the air, soul, thought, style, words, writing, and voice are to man. . . . The ways in which people think and talk are identical to how they build; this is why the character of a building expresses the greater or lesser value of art.” Character, in other words, was the means through which a building communicated particular values and virtues to the general public; its exterior design should therefore be in accordance with its function so as to communicate the right message. This is in part why the battle of the styles took on such intensity, as the character of a building “creates impressions, and these impressions generate notions, which lead to beliefs,” and it would be irresponsible on the part of architects to imprint the wrong beliefs about the Dutch nation among natives and foreign visitors alike. See “Verslag van het verhandelde op de zestiende algemeene bijeenkomst der leden van de Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Bouwkunst, gehouden den 23en Junij 1870, in het lokaal Koningskroon, Plantaadje te Amsterdam,” *Bouwkundige Bijdragen* 18 (1871): 93.

### **“Judaism has to be Orthodox or not at all”: The Amsterdam Jewish community**

Dutch Jewry during the second half of the nineteenth century had an unusually large working class. Particularly in Amsterdam, where more than half of the Jews of Holland resided, the vast majority was poor. In 1861, Jews constituted one-third of the 40-45,000 people who received municipal poor-relief, although they made up only about 10 percent of the population. The Ashkenazic committee for the poor reported around the same time that it provided charity to 52.6 percent of the Ashkenazic community in the form of bread, peat, medical care, and occasionally cash or short-term loans. For the Sephardic community this percentage was over 60 percent. By contrast 17 percent of the non-Jewish population was in receipt of poor relief. While conditions in Amsterdam gradually improved over the course of the century, in 1899, 11 percent of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews still required some form of communal support, some 9 percent more than the non-Jewish population.<sup>27</sup>

As is widely known, Amsterdam Jewry was concentrated in the diamond trade and in cigar manufacturing. The Dutch historian Salvador Bloemgarten has calculated that by 1890 at least 10,000 people worked in the diamond industry as cutters and polishers, 5,500 of whom were Jewish. If one were to include those people indirectly connected to diamond manufacturing – such as those who rented out the work-space or maintained the polishing-mills – this number would rise to 6,500. Assuming, argued Bloemgarten, that each of these laborers supported an average family of four, then it is fair to say that approximately 25,000 Jews in Amsterdam relied on the diamond trade.

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<sup>27</sup> Carolus Reijnders, *Van 'Joodse Natiën' tot Joodse Nederlanders. Een onderzoek naar getto- en assimilatieverschijnselen tussen 1600 en 1942* (Amsterdam: Offsetdrukkerij JOKO, 1969), 80.

Close to half of Jewish Amsterdam – roughly 55,000 Jews lived in the capital in 1890 – thus depended on the diamond industry.<sup>28</sup>

Many Jews also earned a meager living by peddling. An anonymous gentile observer, *Amsterdammer*, wrote of catching sight of “Jews with their carts filled with pears, apples, lemons or oranges,” and “lottery Jews, who can be found on busy street corners” selling lottery tickets (see fig. 2).<sup>29</sup> An annoyed letter writer in the *Jewish Weekly* of 1878 complained of the ubiquitous strawberry trade in the summer, which “has increased so much on Shabbat that even in the back streets . . . carts overflowing with this item are being sold.”<sup>30</sup> In addition to peddling in the streets, Jews sold their wares in open markets. The Waterlooplein, in the center of the old Jewish neighborhood, drew Jews and non-Jews to its highly popular market, where daily necessities, from shoelaces to matches, as well as second-hand goods of every sort could be purchased.

Due in part to Holland’s slow economic recovery, the *embourgeoisement* of Jews occurred more slowly than elsewhere in Europe, where substantial upward mobility was common by mid-nineteenth century. In Amsterdam, however, the bourgeois Jewish elite remained small, and the upward mobility that did take place occurred predominantly in the *kleine middenstand*, or lower middle-class. This meant that the majority of the Jewish population was less concerned with *Bildung* and bourgeois respectability as with trying to keep their heads above water. The Cape Era did generate a boost in income for those

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<sup>28</sup> See Salvador Bloemgarten, “De emancipatie van het Joodse proletariaat,” in *De Gelykstaat der Joden*, ed. by Hetty Berg (Amsterdam and Zwolle: Joods Historisch Museum en Waanders Uitgevers, 1996), 98. Reijnders adds that the number of diamond polishing businesses increased from 4 in 1871 to 70 in 1889, and the number of polishing tables or “mills” from approximately 800 to 7,000. In 1889 some 10,502 diamond workers lived in the Dutch capital, 60 percent of which was Jewish. See Carolus Reijnders, “Op zoek naar oude chewre-sjoeltjes in Amsterdam,” *Hakehilla* 33: 8 (July 1988): 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Amsterdam en de Amsterdammers, door een Amsterdammer* (Deventer: A. J. van den Sigtenhorst, 1875), 33. The author actually writes “china’sappelen instead of sinaasappelen to poke fun at the peddler’s pronunciation.

<sup>30</sup> See “Ingezonden stukken,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 23: 52 (28 Juni, 1878): 3.



working in the diamond industry, which caused growing numbers to move upward into the ranks of the middle-class. A smaller number grew independently wealthy from the luxury trade in diamonds, which brought with it new opportunities and new privileges, among others the right to vote in municipal elections. The Dutch historian Boudien de Vries estimated that the Jewish electorate, i.e., those Jews who paid more than 112 guilders in annual taxes, grew substantially between 1854 and 1884. While Jews had previously been underrepresented in the Amsterdam electorate – they constituted a little over 11 percent of the population but only 8.6 percent of the electorate – in the mid-1880s, by this time 13.4 percent of the city population, they were overrepresented with 17.6 percent.<sup>31</sup>

Among both groups, i.e., the working class as well as the bourgeois elite, synagogue attendance fell. For the former membership fees often proved too high and not a priority compared to other, more pressing, expenses. Many Jews also worked on Saturdays, when gentiles visited the open-markets. Consequently, explained “C.” in the *Jewish Weekly* of 1881, “[these] Jews paid much more attention and care to religious conditions in the home than to the public display of going to synagogue and everything that revolves around that.”<sup>32</sup> For the well-to-do attendance was usually reserved for the High Holidays. As Dutch society became increasingly secular and witnessed declining numbers of Christians attending Sunday services, weekly – let alone daily – visits to the

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<sup>31</sup> The city electorate, explains de Vries, consisted of those men who qualified for the so-called poll tax, which for Amsterdam was a minimum of fl. 112. Before 1887, if one was over 23 years of age and paid more than fl. 112 in taxes (including property tax, “personal” tax, and capital gains tax), one could vote in local and national elections. If one paid less than fl. 112 but more than fl. 56, one could vote in communal elections only. See Boudien de Vries, *Electoraat en elite: Sociale structuur en sociale mobiliteit in Amsterdam, 1850-1895* (Amsterdam: Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1986), 54.

<sup>32</sup> C., “Brieven van een hoofdstedeling aan een landbewoner – XX,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 27: 13 (23 September, 1881): 1. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the rise of socialism and the labor movement, too, became a factor in the Jewish proletariat’s alienation from religion.

synagogue ceased being the norm. While many remained closely attached to Jewish rituals and traditions, a growing number found the temporarily transformed café-chantants to which S. Rose so vehemently objected quite convenient, particularly as the organizers ensured “proper ventilation and generous seating arrangements” by selling only a limited number of “entry tickets.”<sup>33</sup> For these Jews, wrote C., “the [communal] synagogue does not need to exist.”<sup>34</sup> Bourgeois Jews thus attended religious services, but they preferred to do so only a few times a year and preferably at such social clubs as Plancius, the Casino, or the Koningskroon, where they could listen to services that were not unnecessarily prolonged by “archaic” rituals maintained by what one observer called conservative “buffoons.”<sup>35</sup>

The picture that is beginning to emerge is that in Amsterdam the synagogue was rather peripheral to the formation and public projection of a modern Jewish identity. Whereas in cities around Europe synagogues – especially new monumental ones – served as sites to publicize Jewish cultural sophistication and social respectability, in Amsterdam these buildings were not the main stage from which to display *Bildung* and they continued to play a relatively modest role in displaying Jewish *embourgeoisement*. Instead social clubs such as Plancius, public parks such as Artis in the Plantage district, the theater and coffee-houses were the places to be and be seen. “Every Sabbath morning

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<sup>33</sup> A common advertising for these events appeared e.g. in the *NIW* 19: 10 (14 September, 1883), which read: “Rosh Hashanah -Yom Kippur. Locale Koningskroon, Plantage. During the coming High Holidays religious services will be held here. Entrance tickets can be purchased for fl. 1.50 and fl. 2 at locale in question.” The fees for services held at the Casino-building were somewhat higher: “Zwanenburger Street. Rosh Hashanah -Yom Kippur. Tickets for High Holidays are available for fl. 2 and fl. 1.50 per person. To meet high demand, a separate room for women will be arranged . . . The rooms will be very neat and pragmatically designed as a synagogue, and to ensure enough ventilation and generous seating, only a limited number of tickets will be sold.” *NIW* 19: 11 (21 September, 1883).

<sup>34</sup> “Brieven van een hoofdstedeling aan een landbewoner – XX,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 27: 13 (23 September, 1881): 3.

<sup>35</sup> “Ingezonden stukken,” *NIW* 3: 14 (1 November, 1867): 3. This anonymous author complained about the slow pace of reform in the community synagogues, particularly with respect to decorum – a topic that will be elaborated on below.

in spring and summer,” contends the Dutch-Jewish historian Henriëtte Boas, “pious Jews . . . set out to Artis, the men wearing their high hats and black Shabbat-suits, with or without their wives and children; not to look at the monkeys [in Artis’ zoo], but to walk back and forth, to socialize, or to sit on a bench and talk.”<sup>36</sup> The worshippers most loyal to community synagogues, then, were those Jews situated in-between the working class and the bourgeois elite, i.e., the *kleine middenstand*. But there too, according to our letter-writer C., secularization threatened traditional patterns as “most households of the old stamp have a quick Friday night dinner following the first Shabbat service, after which the parents spend the rest of the evening in the street and the youngsters visit coffeehouses.”<sup>37</sup>

While secularization and economic pragmatism caused synagogue attendance to decline, Jews in Amsterdam continued to constitute a distinguishable religious minority. They formed a semi-autonomous group that supported its own religious institutions, educational facilities, and social organizations, which corresponded quite well to the larger *verzuiling*-structure, or pillarized nature, of Dutch society. “Because of their religious practices,” wrote a female letter writer to the *Jewish Weekly* in 1875, “Dutch Jews seclude themselves voluntarily.”<sup>38</sup> While the ongoing acculturation process would

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<sup>36</sup> Henriëtte Boas, “In Joodse en niet-Joodse Spiegel,” *Hakehilla* 27: 3 (March 1982): 16. See also Allard Jolles, “De Plantage,” *Publikaties: Een Uitgave van de Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening Amsterdam* (1993); Richter Roegholt et al., *Wonen en wetenschap in de Plantage: De geschiedenis van een Amsterdamse buurt in driehonderd jaar* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> “Brieven van een hoofdstedeling aan een landbewoner – XXII,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 27: 16 (14 October, 1881): 3.

<sup>38</sup> Eene Jodin, “Ingezonden stukken,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 20: 42 (23 April 1875), 2. This voluntary segregation occurred among Roman Catholics and Protestants as well. One Christian author stated in the Christian daily *Algemeen Handelsblad* that “Catholics and Protestants socialize rarely amongst each other,” although they apparently “cooperated successfully in excluding civilized Jews from social company.” The anonymous author was appalled by this “cowardice and narrow-mindedness,” which “caused these men, to which our city and country owe many responsibilities, to be seen in Parliament but to be barred from salons. . . We do not object to a Jewish minister, professor, or judge, but the thought of Jewish children attending the same schools as Christians causes shivers down our spines.” While some functioned quite

weaken this intramural cohesion – most Jewish children, for instance, attended Dutch public schools by the turn of the century – and while the city of Amsterdam was involved in Jewish affairs through the financial support of the Jewish poor, the community was in many ways still on its own during the 1870s and 1880s. The vast majority continued to live in the Jewish neighborhood (about which more later), maintained social contact mostly with other Jews, and worked predominantly in “Jewish” trades. Yiddish remained common in the privacy of the home and in hevra synagogues, even though most Jews spoke Dutch as well. Inter-marriage was rare, even well into the twentieth century, as was conversion to Christianity. The lack of external pressure to convert and the preference to socialize within Jewish circles inhibited the appeal to leave the fold. The demographer E. Boekman maintained that over 90 percent of Amsterdam Jews followed traditional rites with regard to marriage, funerals, and circumcision well into the 1930s.<sup>39</sup> The community maintained its own system of religious schools, orphanages, hospitals, and poor relief, a form of self-sufficiency that for many gentiles served as a creditable example in a society that became increasingly pillarized along religious, cultural, and social lines. Jewish integration, in the words of the historians Hans Blom and Joel Cahen, thus clearly had its limits.<sup>40</sup>

This is not to imply Jews had not internalized Dutch norms and modes of behavior, or that no meaningful contact existed between Jews and gentiles. On the

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well in the public sphere, in private circles the Jews (as well as other religious groups) remained secluded. See *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 18: 31 (7 February, 1873): 1.

<sup>39</sup> E. Boekman, *De demographie van de Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger & Co. N.V., 1936).

<sup>40</sup> J. C. H. Blom and J. J. Cahen, “Jewish Netherlanders, Netherlands Jews, and Jews in the Netherlands, 1870-1940,” in *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, ed. by J. C. H. Blom, R. G. Fuks-Mansfeld, en I. Schöffer (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 231. See also *Pinkas: Geschiedenis van de joodse gemeenschap in Nederland*, edited by Jozeph Michman, Hartog Beem, and Dan Michman (Ede: Kluwer Algemene Boeken, 1985); *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500-2000)*, ed. by Jonathan Israel and Reinier Salverda (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

contrary, most Jews considered Holland their home, a place that for long had offered them refuge and freedom when many other European countries were unwelcoming. And while in Holland too antisemitism remained a reality – mostly in non-violent forms in elite social circles<sup>41</sup> – Jewish-Christian relations were generally good. It does mean, however, that Amsterdam Jewry in the second half of the nineteenth century remained a visible subculture whose particularism rested on its spatial concentration, distinctive occupational profile, and strong communal networks. While “associations between Jews and Christians [were] becoming more intimate by the day,” contended “C.” in 1881, there was “still a certain distance between them.” A contemporary Christian named A. van Andel agreed. “It is regrettable,” he wrote, “that a gap continues to exist between Jews and Christians and that they know surprisingly little of each other, with respect to religion as well as common values . . . something that is even more startling when one considers the close connection between Judaism and Christianity.”<sup>42</sup> Jews and gentiles, in short, lived together peacefully, but integration, particularly on the social level, remained limited.

This combination of Jewish semi-autonomy, piecemeal acculturation, and political security caused communal institutions to remain strictly Orthodox, despite the fact that a growing number of Jews were not overwhelmingly so in their personal lives.

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<sup>41</sup> While Holland has earned a good reputation due to its comparatively tolerant attitude toward the Jews, it was certainly not immune to antisemitic sentiments. In a meeting of the General Jewish League, for instance, it was recognized that “on a political level complete equality exists between the Jew and his Christian fellow-citizen,” but “on a social level there is still much work to be done . . . a number of local social clubs continue to be closed to Jews.” See “Algemeen Israel. Verbond,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 23: 5 (3 August, 1877): 1.

<sup>42</sup> Adr. van Andel, “Ingezonden stukken,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 19: 29 (23 January, 1874): 1. See also “Brieven van een hoofdstedeling aan een landbewoner – IX,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 26: 47 (20 May, 1881): 3. The earlier mentioned *Amsterdam and its Amsterdammers, by an Amsterdammer* (1875) also recognizes the prevailing social barriers. When speaking of social clubs in Amsterdam, the author states that “the Reunion, a social club with only a thousand members . . . bans everything Jewish.” (p. 13).

Synagogue services, for instance, “while subject to the power of fashion,”<sup>43</sup> did not witness radical reforms, much to the chagrin of some progressive congregants and Reform sympathizers. Indeed, communal leaders preferred an Orthodox status quo, despite the fact that most came from highly acculturated, bourgeois families. “The church council,” wrote the *NIW* in an article entitled “a dubious phenomenon,” “includes men who in no way advertise their Jewishness, who do not live according to Jewish law . . . but who are more conservative than the most zealous *Jehoedi*.”<sup>44</sup> This occurred in part because Dutch society allowed emancipation and acculturation to co-exist with religious Orthodoxy. Having internalized the principle of separation of church and state, Jewish officials saw no need to implement reforms. When the parnasim thus attended council meetings, stated the *NIW*, they were “traditional Jews until the doors of the meeting room closed behind them and they left traditions behind.”<sup>45</sup>

Abraham Carel Wertheim, a prominent banker, philanthropist, and parnas, expressed very well this desire for religious conservatism among Jewish leadership when he stated that “Judaism has to be Orthodox or not at all.”<sup>46</sup> Wertheim, a secular and politically liberal Jew who became a member of Dutch parliament as well as the president of the Central Synagogue in Amsterdam, maintained that the Jewish masses would be

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<sup>43</sup> Chief Rabbi J. H. Dünner, “Lijkrede, uitgesproken op Dinsdag 5 Kislew 5637, aan het graf van wijlen Akiba Lehren 1876,” *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 2: 23 (1 December, 1876): 1. The slow pace of reforms in synagogue services, about which more below, most likely contributed to the Jewish elites’ preference for religious services held at social clubs.

<sup>44</sup> See “Een bedenkelijk verschijnsel,” *NIW* 19: 46 (23 May, 1884), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. An anonymous writer in the *Jewish Weekly*, too, called the parnasim “compliant,” an attitude he found “reassuring” as it would prevent the kind of radical reforms visible in Germany. See *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 17: 40 (12 April, 1872), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Wertheim is quoted in A. S. Rijxman, “A. C. Wertheim, 1832-1897: Een bijdrage tot zijn levens-geschiedenis,” Ph.D Dissertation (Amsterdam: the University of Amsterdam, 1961), 224.

better off remaining faithful to Orthodox values. A remarkable *mariage de raison*<sup>47</sup> between acculturated parnasim and Orthodox rabbis developed, which encouraged Jewish Orthodoxy in religious worship but which also accepted the rather lax observance of Jewish law by large groups of affiliates.

That synagogue services remained Orthodox does not mean they were immune to change. Over the course of the century reforms had been introduced, particularly regarding decorum. They were mainly cosmetic changes that did not clash with Jewish law, such as the length of the service, “orderly” conduct, the formal dress of synagogue officials, the introduction of a choir, and the sale of mitzvot. These reforms, however, were implemented slowly and reluctantly. For instance, the use of small wooden hammers during Purim “to knock against the candle holders on the bimah whenever Haman is mentioned,” a ritual that in many places had been banned because it was no longer considered appropriate religious etiquette, remained customary in the New Synagogue. The newly appointed German chief rabbi Joseph Dünner, when delivering his first lecture to the Amsterdam community in the mid-1870s, was so surprised to see his co-religionists sway their upper bodies back and forth that he exclaimed: “Ist das hier ein Ruderverein?” (Is this a rowing club?).<sup>48</sup> The historian S. van Praag, too, highlighted the disinclination to reform long-standing traditions by showing that in 1865 Jewish leadership was still debating whether sermons should be held in Yiddish or in Dutch, and that the former remained common in both communal and hevra synagogues.<sup>49</sup> Even in the

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<sup>47</sup> H. Daalder used this term in his article “Joden in verzuilend Nederland,” in *Politiek en historie: Opstellen over Nederlandse politiek en vergelijkende politieke wetenschap* (Amsterdam: 1990), 104.

<sup>48</sup> Mozes Heiman Gans, *Memorbook: Pictorial History of Dutch Jewry from the Renaissance to 1940* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1971), 568.

<sup>49</sup> S. van Praag, *De West-Joden en hun letterkunde sinds 1860* (1926), 108. See also Irene E. Zwiep, “Yiddish, Dutch and Hebrew: Language Theory, Language Ideology and the Emancipation of Nineteenth-Century Dutch Jewry,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 34: 1 (2000): 56-73.

mid-1880s, a reader of the *NIW* who called himself “Bo” complained of persistent traditionalism, particularly regarding unruliness in the New Synagogue, arguing that “it is almost unbearable for any sane person” to sit through the entire service: “the unnecessary breaks . . . the silent agreement that we don’t have to begin on time . . . This twisting and turning, prolonging, postponing continues until we are repulsively bored and sigh with relief when the end is near.”<sup>50</sup> Wondering why the Amsterdam community “is still so grievously behind, continuing to hold on to old misuses,” many a reader expressed his desire for more strictly enforced reforms.

Objections to “endless babbling” during the service, to “the drawn-out piyyutim [liturgical hymns] on Sabbaths and holidays,” to the “earsplitting roars whenever prayers are read,” and to the “snail’s-pace of reform initiatives” were quite common.<sup>51</sup> However, so were concerns over the potential outcome of implementing too many modifications to religious worship, for which Germany and Berlin in particular, frequently served as a case in point. While the Berlin *Gemeinde* was admired for its orderly synagogue worship, which, according to one reader, bordered on “military punctuality and uniformity,”<sup>52</sup> it was also eyed with great suspicion. The German Reform movement, referred to by some Dutch contemporaries as the “Jewish Reformation,” would mean the end of Jewish religious life in Amsterdam as they knew it, which neither the Orthodox rabbis nor the

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<sup>50</sup> “Bo,” Ingezonden Stukken, *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 21: 14 (9 October, 1885): 3. The reference to the use of “Haman-hammers” was made by Veritas in the *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 8, no. 1 (26 July, 1872). Religious traditions such as these partly explain why an increasing number of Jews, who adopted Dutch modes of behavior, felt increasingly uncomfortable with the synagogue service. Perhaps there was a disconnect in the pace of change on the socio-economic level and that concerning the religious sphere, encouraging a growing indifference toward traditional synagogue services (*onverschilligheid* or indifference was a much-used term of criticism in contemporary writings).

<sup>51</sup> *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 14, no. 50 (25 June, 1869): 2-3; *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 26, no. 10 (3 September, 1880): 3; *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 14: 44 (14 May, 1869): 2-3; *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 26: 10 (3 September, 1880): 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 11: 6 (25 August, 1865): 2.



acculturated parnasim favored. Both maintained instead that “certain shortcomings would be resolved on their own by general progress and increasing civilization [*beschaving*], for which only patience is required.”<sup>53</sup> This approach seemed even more rational in light of the Dutch context, given the lack of external political reasons to push ahead with Reform.

Jewish leaders therefore felt ambivalent about implementing reforms. On the one hand they acknowledged the necessity of aesthetic updates to help the population become more “civilized” and to meet popular demand. They realized that Jews, particularly those moving up into the *kleine middenstand*, “nowadays set different standards for public worship, standards that are in harmony with their raised aesthetic sensibilities.” Moderate concessions, i.e., cosmetic reforms, would appease the public and prevent the kind of radical measures introduced in Germany. “Choral singing in the synagogue,” in other words, “[would] prevent an organ . . . [we] prefer a choir over an organ any time.”<sup>54</sup> On the other hand Jewish officials were reluctant to implement liturgical reforms as they might alienate those Orthodox Jews who were still attending services. “We could reform for those who are absent, but the result would be that those present would be chased away as well! [*weggereformeerd*] . . . Ask any reformed community abroad, where modernization has elevated the synagogue to a theater and concert hall, if the cantor and rabbi don’t perform for empty benches.”<sup>55</sup> In a community that remained predominantly Orthodox and that did not consider modernization a religious or political necessity, reforms in synagogue services were few and far between.

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<sup>53</sup> See a letter submitted under the pseudonym “A. Wellwisher” in the *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 15: 15 (22 October, 1869): 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Israelitische Nieuwsbode* 1: 9 (27 August, 1875); Veritas, “Ingezonden stukken,” *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 3: 13 (25 October, 1867): 4.

<sup>55</sup> “Godsdienstvormen,” *NIW* 18: 34 (2 March, 1883): 1.

It might be worth repeating that Dutch Jews had enjoyed full legal rights since 1796 and that their political status was widely accepted and secure in Dutch society in the second half of the nineteenth century. While there were small groups of extremists campaigning for the foundation of a Christian state, they were a minority and the Jews felt confident that equal rights would remain a pillar of the Dutch constitution. “Love of freedom,” wrote one contemporary, “is so entrenched in our country’s history and in the hearts of its inhabitants, that the sporadic attempts to undermine Dutch traditions remain unnoticed and utterly futile.”<sup>56</sup> Political rights were thus not of primary concern and Dutch Jewry felt largely “convinced that the Jew in the Netherlands . . . is above all a Jewish Dutchman. His position here, compared to that of his brethren in every other state – including England – is truly envious.”<sup>57</sup> This sense of confidence and safety had two important consequences. First, the question of reform remained disconnected from the quest for emancipation. There was no need to prove the Jews’ “worthiness” to the larger population in order to secure political rights or to prevent a reversal of their legal standing.

Second, the cosmetic reforms that *were* implemented did not aim to transform Judaism from an all-embracing identity into “merely” the religious component of one’s self. Most Dutch Jews thus rejected the Reform movement in neighboring Germany, the content and objective of which they found “unnatural,” forced, and far too radical. German Jews were trying too hard to deny their Jewishness. That radical reforms were both destructive to Judaism and ineffective in achieving full equality was only reinforced

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<sup>56</sup> *Centraal Blad voor Israëlieten* 5: 23 (20 September, 1889): 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 12: 15 (26 October, 1866): 1.

by the growing centrality of the Jewish Question in German public discourse. Reform seemed to achieve the opposite effect in the eyes of Dutch observers.

In addition to ideological objections, practical issues, too, contributed to the reluctance to introduce reform and the ease with which new reforms were repealed. Financial considerations, for instance, played a role. A number of community synagogues cancelled their occasional sermons in Dutch during the winter season as it was too cold for listeners and speakers alike in unheated synagogues and too expensive to warm them. The civilizing power of cultivated sermons was appreciated, but not at the cost of having to sit and listen to a shivering lecturer in freezing temperatures.<sup>58</sup> The continuation of the male choir, too, became a topic of heated debate after the initial choir members – boys from the local orphanage who sang at no charge – were replaced by adults, who began to request payment. As they needed to leave their businesses early on Friday afternoons, choir members appealed for compensation. “We believe,” wrote an irritated reader of the *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* [Jewish Courier], “that following other large cities abroad, the Great Synagogue, the home of our community, requires a decent choir so they do not have to be embarrassed to receive strangers.” He accused Jewish officials of “wanting a choir, but refusing to provide the necessary means to create one.” At the next board meeting, a parnas named Lob could not believe how “they dared to add expenses to an already strained budget for tenors and basses! . . . This is not the right time to support a

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<sup>58</sup> X.X.X. wrote in 1867: “To my disappointment I have been told that our sermons, held at the Great and New Synagogue, have been cancelled for the winter season, due to the cold, bleak weather that is expected render it uncomfortable for speakers and listeners to congregate any longer than necessary in unheated, drafty, and cold buildings.” The author suggested submitting a petition to the local Jewish council to reinstate the sermons. See X.X.X., “Ingezonden stukken,” *NIW* 3: 16 (15 November, 1867): 3. An annoyed contemporary who submitted a letter to the Jewish Weekly shared this concern and implied that because “we are still sufficiently narrow-minded to consider the sermon an *encore* rather than essential part of the service,” cancelling the sermon altogether was relatively uncomplicated. *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 15: 9 (17 September, 1869): 2-3.

choir.” While the board ultimately agreed “the choir should be maintained, particularly since it ensured general contentment,” no salaries were provided for its members and no attempts were made to introduce choirs in synagogues other than the Great Synagogue until the early 1890s.<sup>59</sup>

Since reforms in synagogue services in Amsterdam remained moderate, and since “the vast majority of the Dutch Jewish population [did] not consider radical changes necessary or desirable,”<sup>60</sup> the traditional interior design of the synagogue building was not subject to structural adaptation. There was no need to install organs, to create mixed seating, and to move the bimah closer to the ark so as to more closely resemble Christian churches. Interior lay-outs thus remained largely unchanged and internal construction projects were limited to maintenance and repair. Furthermore, the lack of a Reform movement – combined with the small Jewish bourgeoisie and the community’s fragile financial state – rendered the building of an entirely new “temple” less appealing as well. One author named Jacob B. Citroen elaborated on the connection between Amsterdam’s

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<sup>59</sup> *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 4: 14 (20 July, 1888): 2-3: “Nabetrachting,” *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* vol. 5:40 (17 January, 1890): 1; “Vergadering van de kerkeraad,” *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 5: 48 (14 March, 1890): 2. The *Centraal Blad voor Israëlieten in Nederland* [Central Journal for the Jews in the Netherlands] reports in 1888 that “only the Great Synagogue has the privilege of a choir [despite the fact that] its elevating effect contributes greatly to the decorum in the synagogue.” See *Centraal Blad voor Israëlieten* 4: 8 (5 June, 1888): 2.

<sup>60</sup> “Hervormingen in den eeredienst,” *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 2: 32 (2 February, 1877): 1-2. The authors, also the editors of the newspaper, make a distinction here between reform with a capital r as occurred in Germany, and reform with a small r, which they witnessed in Holland. The former, they suggested, challenged *halakhic* law and was a product of external pressure while the latter was moderate and the result of acculturation. Dutch Jewry, they argued, had no need for Reform as “there is absolutely no pressure from local conditions” to alter religious fundamentals.

There had been a short-lived and small Reform community in Amsterdam in 1860 named *Sjochre Dea*, which was founded by the German Rabbi Chronik. Due to the lack of interest among community members and the strong opposition from Amsterdam Jewish leadership, Chronik left for Chicago, where he set up a new Reform community. A statement of their program can be found at the Amsterdam Community Archives # O.941-078: “Programma voor de Nederlandsch-Israëlitische Kerkelijke Eeredienst, vastgesteld door het comité der vereniging *Sjochre Dea*, en medegeedeeld in de algemeene vergadering, gehouden den 5 Tamoez 5620/25 Junij 1860.”

Orthodoxy and the absence of new building initiatives in the 1878 edition of the *Jewish Weekly*:

The annoyance of clattering the reading desks is, in my view, inseparable from the potential rebuilding of the synagogue, as the latter would emerge from the abolition of the former. If there were more conversations about this in wider circles, it would appear a far-reaching attempt to provide the Jewish community in Amsterdam with a praiseworthy synagogue might be feasible. . . This rebuilding would also solve the current problem of the appropriate place to hold sermons, as visitors no longer need to leave their seats and crowd around the bimah, as is currently the case. Indeed, why place the bimah in the middle of the synagogue, *exactly* where a free passageway is indispensable?<sup>61</sup>

For Citroen, the implementation of more rigorous reforms would stimulate a more widely-shared desire among Jews to construct a new building, one that would meet and promote contemporary standards of decorum and convenience. However, suggests Citroen, since discussion over substantive reforms was confined to limited circles, the Jewish religious landscape remained largely unchanged. What seemed to be the widely-shared belief instead was summed up by an anonymous observer in the *Jewish Courier*, who asked his Jewish readers: “what would be better, a beautiful façade that veils a dilapidated, cold, appalling, and decaying home? Or a proper, comfortable, well-arranged, and warm home with an old-fashioned, dirty, unattractive façade?”<sup>62</sup> The author’s preference for the second – one that ranked religious content over public appearance – suggests the aesthetics of synagogue buildings was not considered paramount.

The moderation of religious reforms in Amsterdam inhibited an important shift to take place in the very nature and purpose of the synagogue. In urban communities elsewhere the synagogues transformed from a place dedicated almost exclusively to communal prayer to one that encouraged the moral “edification” of the individual. The

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<sup>61</sup> Jacob B. Citroen, “Een merkwaardig adres,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 23: 10 (6 September, 1878): 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 6: 44 (29 April, 1881): 1.

“edifying” sermon in particular, delivered in the vernacular in many synagogues across northern European cities, contributed to this altered conception of the synagogue. They were meant to promote religious ethics, but, more importantly, to “stimulate general morals and a sense of social obligation, inspire religious feeling, patriotism and loyalty to the king, have a civilizing influence on the young, encourage decent trades and condemn begging and laziness.”<sup>63</sup> These sermons rendered the synagogue not merely a place to fulfill a divine commandment, where the primary focus was on God and on reciting prayers in a language that most could not understand; they also rendered it a place for the edification of the individual, where comprehensible sermons motivated the worshiper to become a person of high moral standing, well-acclimated to the larger society in which he or she lived. “Inspired,” contends Michael Meyer, “the worshiper went forth a changed person, not because a duty had been performed or a specific lesson learned, but because he or she had participated in a comprehensive subjective experience that included the liturgy, the music, the sermon, and even the building itself – all of them instruments for transforming the inner state of the worshiper.”<sup>64</sup> In the Orthodox community of Amsterdam, however, a firm embrace of synagogue reforms and the subsequent integration of secular goals into the religious domain of the synagogue took hold much later. Prayer houses did not become *Erbauungslokalen*, as Meyer described

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<sup>63</sup> D. S. van Zuiden, “Een poging om het Nederlandsch ‘Jiddisch’ te doen verdwijnen,” in *De Vrijdagavond* 7: 3 (1930). While sermons had been introduced and promoted earlier in the century (for which the Committee for Jewish Affairs awarded a silver medal), they were held only for special occasions. Most rabbis were from Germany and unable to preach in the national tongue. Sermons were usually held in Yiddish or German and published in Dutch at a later date. Not until the late 1870s do we see the replacement of Yiddish and German by Dutch. See, for instance, Bart Wallet’s “Religious Oratory and the Improvement of Congregants: Dutch-Jewish preaching in the first half of the nineteenth century,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 34: 2 (2000):168-193.

<sup>64</sup> Michael A. Meyer, “‘How Awesome is this Place!’ The Reconceptualisation of the Synagogue in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” in *Judaism within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion*, edited by Michael A. Meyer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 233.

nineteenth-century German synagogues, dedicated to the civil and moral improvement of man; rather, community synagogues in the Dutch capital remained inherently religious spaces, leaving the small Jewish elite's urge to display their bourgeois sophistication limited to the secular domain.

### **The Demography of Amsterdam Jewry in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century**

The Jewish population in Amsterdam grew significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Whereas in 1849 approximately 25,000 Jews called Amsterdam their home, in 1889 this number had increased to almost 55,000. Between the late 1860s and late 1880s alone, the city's Jewish population grew 81 percent.<sup>65</sup> In contrast to other European capitals, this increase was not due primarily to immigration from Eastern Europe. While the Dutch capital did attract *Ostjuden*, a significant number stayed only temporarily and traveled on to London and New York. A more probable cause was the comparatively high Jewish birth rate combined with low infant mortality, both due to better medical care and improved public health.<sup>66</sup> A local resident wrote in 1875 that the expansion of the city's system of water pipes and its placement of "water pumps all over the city where those, who live in homes without fresh water coming from the dunes, can purchase water for one cent a bucket," had "a blessed influence on the health situation in

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<sup>65</sup> Carolus Reijnders, *Van "Joodse Natiën" tot Joodse Nederlanders. Een onderzoek naar ghetto- en assimilatieverschijnselen tussen 1600 en 1942* (Amsterdam: Offsetdrukkerij JOKO, 1969), 81.

<sup>66</sup> J. C. H. Blom and J. J. Cahen, "Jewish Netherlanders, Netherlands Jews, and Jews in the Netherlands, 1870-1940," in *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, ed. by J. C. H. Blom, R. G. Fuks-Mansfeld, and I. Schöffer (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 233. Blom and Cahen point out that improved census procedures, too, might have contributed to higher numbers of Jews living in Amsterdam in the 1880s as compared to the middle of the century. See also Dan Michman, "Migration versus 'Species Hollandia Judaica': The Role of Migration in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in Preserving Ties Between Dutch and World Jewry," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 23: 2 (Fall 1989): 54-76.

Amsterdam.”<sup>67</sup> The urbanization of Dutch Jews living in the *mediene* played a role as well. After Amsterdam showed signs of revitalization after decades of economic malaise and needed skilled workers to build its new residential neighborhoods, railway station, banks and hotels, Jews moved to the capital in significant numbers. They were not attracted to the employment opportunities in construction – Jews generally did not work in the building trade. An expanding economy, however, brought with it an expanding bourgeoisie and therefore a higher demand for luxury goods such as cigars and jewelry, both of which were “Jewish” trades. During the Cape Era in the early 1870s in particular, when the diamond industry was booming, large numbers of Jews moved to the city. By the end of the century 56.4 percent of Dutch Jewry lived in Amsterdam, 13 percent more than at mid-century.<sup>68</sup>

The majority of these Jewish migrants moved into the Jewish neighborhood,<sup>69</sup> the old core of which became increasingly cramped after the 1870s, featuring the highest population density and number of inhabitants per apartment in the entire city (see fig. 3). Thirty percent more people lived in the area around the Jodenbreestraat in 1873 than in 1795, while the Uilenburg area witnessed an increase of 24 percent. In order to accommodate these newcomers, alleyways were filled up with cheap, narrow buildings and existing homes were split up to create more rooms. The physician and urban planner

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<sup>67</sup> *Amsterdam en de Amsterdammers, door een Amsterdammer* (A. J. van den Sigtenhorst, 1875), 71.

<sup>68</sup> E. Boekman, *Demografie van de Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger & Co. N.V., 1936), 33. Between 1869 and 1899, when the Jewish population in Amsterdam rose to more than 59,000, approximately 13,000 Jews came from the *mediene*. See Reijnders, “Op zoek naar oude *chewre-sjoeltjes* in Amsterdam,” *Hakehilla* 33: 8 (juli 1988): 20.

<sup>69</sup> The Jewish neighborhood in Amsterdam included three adjoining centers, the first (and the oldest) one comprised the Waterloo- and J.D. Meijer Square, the Jodenbree- and Antoniebreestraat, the islands Uilenburg, Marken, and Rapenburg, and the Nieuwe Heren- and Keizersgracht. The second center concentrated around the Weesperstraat and the third further south-east around the Sarphatistraat and the Plantage district, which developed during the 1870s. The Jordaan neighborhood in the west, which was entirely inhabited by the Christian working-class, was probably equally dense in population and equally miserable in living conditions as the Jewish slums. See Salvador Bloemgarten and Jaap van Velzen, *Joods Amsterdam in een bewogen tijd, 1890-1940. Een beeldverhaal* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1997), 10.



Samuel Sarphati concluded that the majority of these living arrangements were appalling and would not even be considered suitable for pets by most Amsterdam residents.<sup>70</sup>

While new residential neighborhoods were being built outside of the *stadsring* (the former city limits), they generally did not attract Jews, who remained tied to the streets in and bordering the Jewish district. This “rootedness” not only had sociological or ideological dimensions (which will be discussed below); there were also very practical explanations. Since the Jewish neighborhood was characterized by mixed urban functions – industry, trade, recreation, transportation, and residency were not yet segregated – Jews could continue to live in the immediate vicinity of their work, their kosher butcher, their synagogue, and their family. Moreover, the city’s expansion of residential homes ironically obstructed working class Jews from moving into new and better areas. As land prices had begun to rise – and would continue to do so for the remainder of the nineteenth century – rental prices in better regions became much higher than most Jews could afford, forcing them to remain where they were. While the small but growing Jewish elite moved to better streets in the neighboring Plantage district, which became largely Jewish, the greater part of the population remained behind in increasingly crowded streets. The higher demand for affordable housing, however, drove up rents there as well, even more so as city planners began to replace run-down but cheap housing in the city-center with new office buildings and department stores.<sup>71</sup> The growing number of working-class residents, combined with a decrease in inexpensive rooms, forced people to share living

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<sup>70</sup> Dr. Sarphati is quoted in Arnold van der Valk’s excellent doctoral dissertation on urban planning in the Dutch capital during the second half of the nineteenth century. See “Amsterdam in aanleg: Planvorming en dagelijks handelen 1850-1900” (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 14 April 1989), 66.

<sup>71</sup> Boekman writes that between 1850 and 1909 the number of homes in the old city center, i.e. between the Singel, the Amstel river, the Nieuwe Herengracht, the J. D. Meijer square, Marken-canal, Island-canal and the Oude Waal, decreased from 7,298 to 5,375. See E. Boekman, “Oude en nieuwe Jodenbuurten te Amsterdam,” *De Vrijdagavond* 1: 22 (Augustus 22, 1924): 349.

space with others more than in previous decades.<sup>72</sup> Widespread poverty and overcrowded slums led to such deplorable circumstances in the old section of the Jewish neighborhood that a German visitor reported in 1891 that “one imagines oneself transported back in time to Toledo or to the old Rumanian ghetto.”<sup>73</sup>

The overall pattern of Jewish residence in Amsterdam was therefore somewhat peculiar, particularly in comparison to other European cities during this time. Rather than moving from the old center into western boroughs or newly-constructed residential suburbs, those Jews who could afford to do so generally remained close-by and settled in streets directly connected to the existing neighborhood (see fig. 4). They hereby imitated the pattern typical for bourgeois Christians, who moved to better locations but within the city center. The percentage of Jews living in the area between the old quarter and the Nieuwmarkt, for instance, increased to 62 percent in the 1870s, whereas the number of Jewish residents in the Weesperstraat neighborhood south of the old quarter almost doubled to 4,782 or 43 percent of the area’s population.<sup>74</sup> Boudien de Vries calculated that in the mid-1880s 60.3 percent of the Jewish electorate, i.e., of the Jewish

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<sup>72</sup> Percentage-wise the rental prices in working-class districts increased at a higher rate than in middle-class and upper-class areas. Arnold van der Valk maintains that, as a result of this increase in population and rental prices, an average of 10.5 people shared a home in Amsterdam in 1859. In the old Jewish quarter this number was considerably higher; Reijnders calculated that already in 1795 the number of inhabitants per house was over 25 against the city average of 8. See Reijnders, *Van “Joodse Natiën” tot Joodse Nederlanders*, 78; Th. Van Tijn, “Het social eleven in Nederland, 1844-1875,” *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden: Nederland en België, 1840-1914. Vol. 12: Nieuwste Tijd* (Haarlem: Fibula – van Dishoeck, 1977), 89; Jan Kok, Kees Mandemakers, and Henk Wals, “City Nomads: Changing Residence as a Coping Strategy, Amsterdam, 1890-1940,” *Social Science History* 29: 1 (Spring 2005): 15-43.

<sup>73</sup> M. Sulzberger, Amsterdam, *Illustrierte Zeitung* (4 July, 1891). GAA: *Persverzameling Hartkamp 1* (1840-1915), 31-32.

<sup>74</sup> Reijnders, 80. Almost half of the Jews living in the Weesperbuurt district were Sephardic, particularly in the Joden Kerkstraat [Jews’ Church Street], which was known in local parlance as the “Portuguese Church Street.” It is interesting to note that not merely did Jews cluster among themselves, so did the Sephardim within the Jewish neighborhood. Relations between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim had been polite, but only toward the end of the nineteenth century do we see a normalization in their relations, which is visible in the higher number of Sephardic-Ashkenazic marriages.

bourgeoisie, still lived in the old quarter and the Plantage.<sup>75</sup> Like an ink-pattern, the Jewish area expanded further east and southward, with the desperately poor residing in the old slums centered around Marken and the Joden Houttuinen, the better-off in side streets, and the bourgeois moving increasingly outward to canal streets and the Plantage district. These borders, however, were rather fluid; many areas were socially and economically heterogeneous. The respectable Weesperbuurt district, for instance, which was a popular location for those on the rise in the diamond industry, also included “canal homes divided into four floors, each of which inhabited by a different family, many of whom were struggling financially.”<sup>76</sup> In old and new districts with large Jewish populations, then, horizontal as well as vertical segregation took place. The street as well as the floor – a ground-floor apartment as opposed to an attic or cellar – reflected one’s socio-economic position.<sup>77</sup>

This is not to say that no Jews settled in urban areas away from the Jewish neighborhood; some Jewish notables lived in the city’s well-known “golden curve,” the most expensive real estate in the city located on the Heerengracht. A substantial number of lower-middle class Jews moved south-east to the Pijp and the Dapperbuurt in the late 1870s after a number of diamond factories had been established there. Typically these neighborhoods outside of the *stadsring* also acquired a Jewish territorial dimension; Jews

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<sup>75</sup> See de Vries, *Electoraat en elite: Sociale structuur en sociale mobiliteit in Amsterdam, 1850-1895*, 65. Many of these homes, I was told by a retired urban planner in the Amsterdam Community Archives, had two separate kitchens and menorah imprints on door posts. Those homes belonging to diamond traders often had closed skirting-boards on the floors to minimize the loss of stones and small shutters built into doors.

<sup>76</sup> Jacob Parsser in Henriëtte Boas’ “The Weesperbuurt,” *Hakehilla* 33: 1 (September 1987): 21.

<sup>77</sup> A. G. Blik, for instance, a Jewish diamond polisher who lived at the Weesperstraat, was taxed according to category 5, division 22: 1 share at fl. 3. Ah. M. Bolle, on the other hand, who lived at the nearby but better-off Weesperplein [Weesper Square], was taxed according to category 4, division 15 and paid fl. 33. However, one resident named Witjas, who also lived at the Weesper Square, paid only fl. 6 (category 5, division 21, 2 shares).

clustered together in particular streets and formed little enclaves. Especially around the turn of the century – a full generation later than elsewhere, in part due to late *embourgeoisement* – more Jews began to disperse over the city, mainly after urban planners and the city council approved plans to tear down parts of the old slums.<sup>78</sup> For the larger part of the nineteenth century, however, the majority of the Jewish population exhibited no urge to leave and remained within close proximity of the old core. The Jewish quarter, therefore, was not purged of its middle-class citizens; it retained this group in its midst, which had significant consequences for its urban development and socio-cultural networks.

Because Jews of different socio-economic backgrounds continued to live and work within a relatively confined urban area in the eastern part of the city, the *Jodenbuurt* remained the center of Jewish life. It was, in the words of E. Boekman, “as Jewish” in the late 1800s and early 1900s as it had been in the previous decades.<sup>79</sup> Residents were surrounded by Jewish sights and sounds, from religious and secular institutions and open market places at the Waterloo Square, to local bakeries, butchers, and pharmacies. Many streets had Jewish names; the Nieuwe Amstelstraat, for instance, was known in local parlance as the Sjoelstraat (or shul-street), the Zwanerburgerstraat as Nijgas (Yiddish for new street), and the Muiderstraat as Wagengas (or wagon street).<sup>80</sup> When visitors strolled through the area in the 1880s, they would pass the new Jewish hospital built in 1883 on the Nieuwe Keizersgracht, the building of the Jewish social club Plancius at the Plantage

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<sup>78</sup> Reijnders states that in 1849 Jews settled in more than fifty different districts in Amsterdam, considerably more than during the late eighteenth century. He affirms, however, that actual numbers remained low and comprised only a few percentage points of the Jewish population as a whole. See Reijnders, *Van “Joodse Natiën” tot Joodse Nederlanders*, 79.

<sup>79</sup> E. Boekman, “Oude en Nieuwe Buurten te Amsterdam,” *De Vrijdagavond* 1:22 (22 August, 1924): 349-350. As late as 1920, 97 percent of the population living at Marken and 95 percent at the Jodenbreestraat area, was Jewish.

<sup>80</sup> Henri Polak, “Het Amsterdamsche Ghetto,” *De Vrijdagavond* 1: 19 (1 Augustus 1924): 293.

Middenlaan (1876), the diamond factory Boas at the Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat (1878, which included a very small synagogue with a clock tower, approximately 12 by 8 feet, for its workers, see fig. 5), the new Beth Midrash Ets Chaim at the Rapenburgerstraat (1883), and the Hotel Plantage in the Muiderstraat – which was, according to the *NIW*, particularly intended for accommodating Jews visiting Amsterdam and which kept a strictly kosher kitchen.<sup>81</sup> This observer would also catch sight of the numerous hevra synagogues, such as Agoedas Ahoewim at the Uilenburgerstraat, Shangarei Tsion at the Valkenburgerstraat, and Mewackshy Jousher at St. Antoniebreestraat, Daniel de Castro’s pharmacy at the Muiderstraat, the old people’s home, the Jewish orphanage Megdale Jethonin, and places of entertainment such as De Harmonie at the Zwanenburgerstraat, and Diligentsia at the Waterloo Square. Amsterdam Jewry in the second half of the nineteenth century, one might say, continued to live in an expanding and voluntary “ghetto.”<sup>82</sup>

Exposure to and immersion in an urban environment in which Jewish life was so visible slowed acculturation and integration into the larger society. In the eyes of Dutch contemporaries, it was perfectly acceptable for Jews to have an internal cohesion in a manner similar to that of other Dutch “pillars” and to socialize primarily within their own group. Dutch Roman Catholics, for instance, followed a similar form of religious and ideological segregation by founding their own schools and universities, social clubs, newspapers, political parties, trade union, and relief organizations after the 1860s,

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<sup>81</sup> *NIW* 19: 21 (20 November, 1883): 3.

<sup>82</sup> While the word “ghetto” often refers to the imposed spatial restrictions of Jews by gentile rulers and therefore has negative connotations, it is used here in a more positive way. Nineteenth-century Jews in Amsterdam used the term “voluntary ghetto” in a variety of different contexts, generally referring to the densely populated areas around the old center, such as the Uilenburgerstraat and the Rapenburgerstraat. See, for instance, *NIW* 18: 31 (9 February, 1883): 3.

although they, unlike Amsterdam Jewry, did not cluster in a particular urban district. Protestants, too, as well as Socialists in the final decades of the nineteenth century, created highly organized vertical pillars in Dutch society, each with its own social, cultural, political, and religious institutions. While the vast majority of Jews in Amsterdam thus adopted Dutch cultural mores and considered themselves devoted citizens, they remained closely connected to Jewish socio-cultural networks and maintained a strong Jewish identity. References to “the Jewish nation” or “our people,” for instance, were not uncommon in contemporary literature, as were declarations of loyalty to the Dutch royal family and to the Dutch state. Many secularized Jews, wrote “C.” in an 1881 letter to a Dutch-Jewish weekly, “who never visit the synagogue and who follow no Mosaic laws, will serve kosher food on the day their son is circumcised and will visit the synagogue for prayers . . . Their feet stand outside of Judaism, but their arms continue to embrace it. . . Judaism is still so alluring that they are unable to free themselves from it.”<sup>83</sup> Since they lived in a society that tolerated internal subcultures, Jews did not feel pressured to “free themselves” from Orthodox Judaism, and most consequently chose to settle among relatives in a neighborhood that provided them with all the necessary resources, including facilities for religious devotion, cultural entertainment, employment, medical care and poor relief.

The domain in which most Jewish residents lived during the later 1800s was recognized by Jews and gentiles alike as largely a Jewish domain, where locally based customs, familiar sounds, and widely-known urban markers – pharmacies, hospitals, social clubs, synagogues, the Waterloo Square market – reminded Jews constantly of

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<sup>83</sup> C., “Brieven van een hoofdstedeling aan een landbewoner – XX,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 27: 13 (23 September, 1881): 1.

their religious and ethnic identity. Indeed, the continuing centrality of the neighborhood introduced new social, educational, and cultural institutions into its very midst, which enhanced the confrontation with and immersion in Jewish life. More importantly, it showed that a modern identity did not necessarily require the relocation to gentile suburbs or the abandonment of *Judentum*. Rather, one could become a socially respectable and culturally sophisticated bourgeois Dutchman and still live in or near the Jewish neighborhood. One might argue that most Jews in Amsterdam, whether a poor peddler or an upper-class *bourgeois*, shared a place-based sense of self, an identity that was closely connected to territory which, until the 1930s, was not considered obstructive to acculturation or social advancement.

It is in this context that we should scrutinize synagogue building in Amsterdam during the second half of the nineteenth century. Not only did Jewish community leaders struggle financially to provide their rapidly growing population with basic services such as poor relief and education; they also did not believe it to be a priority to erect a monumental new synagogue at a time when land prices were rising exponentially and secularization was increasingly common among the large working class (who generally could not afford synagogue membership) and the small bourgeoisie, who increasingly became so-called “three-day Jews,” i.e., Jews who only visited the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Moreover, Jewish officials did not consider it necessary to construct an architectural landmark in order to make a public statement regarding Jewish political status or social standing. “There’s no reason to fear that [our government] would limit our rights and our freedoms,” wrote the *NIW* in October 1866, “[f]or us Jews there are no grounds for discontent about the past, and there are no incentives for concern or

distrust for the future.”<sup>84</sup> Consequently, resources that might have been earmarked for building projects were spent on maintenance and renovation, and in neither did architecture serve a representative function vis-à-vis the larger Dutch community.

### **A Nineteenth-Century Dutch Synagogue Tradition?**

Under French occupation in the early nineteenth century, the Amsterdam community owned eight synagogues, all built between 1671 and 1799. By 1880, when S. Rose wrote his angry appeal to the *NIW* for a new synagogue, this number had not changed, despite the fact that the Jewish population in the city had more than doubled. These houses of worship seated 2518 men and 537 women out of a total population of more than 50,000 Jews. The previous pages have suggested that the socio-economic make-up of the Jewish population, their spatial concentration, and increasing secularization contributed to the lack of new building initiatives. An additional cause that deserves attention was the community’s financial situation, which remained precarious in the second half of the nineteenth century.

That the community’s financial difficulties hampered the building of new synagogues is apparent, for instance, in a discussion among the *parnasim* at a meeting in November 1880 about heating the city’s synagogues. For years worshipers had complained about the lack of heating during the winter, and this at a time when houses of worship abroad were well-heated. “Any place abroad that is of some significance has heated churches,” complained “P.” in 1877. “Why does Amsterdam, where religious spirituality is still alive and well, not pay more attention to the need for physical

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<sup>84</sup> “Onze staatkundige toestand,” *NIW* 2: 11 (12 October, 1866): 1.



warmth?”<sup>85</sup> Since this “backwardness” discouraged congregants from attending services in communal synagogues and contributed to the popularity of hevrot, which, being small, were easily heated, some parnasim suggested conducting an experiment to see if heating communal synagogues would improve attendance. One member, however, feared the financial consequences: “Once we start heating one synagogue, then people will demand all of them to be heated. The costs will rise into the thousands, not to mention the extra personnel that will need to be hired.” Another parnas agreed, adding that “Jews have been warmed by prayers for all these years. We are Orientals [*Oosterlingen*], why would we be colder than Christians?”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, he stated, “this begs the question whether we are more exposed to the cold than Christians. Are Christian churches heated? How long is their service?” Both gentlemen not only found heating synagogues an “endless task” that would deprive the community of valuable monetary resources; they also implied that a decision should not be taken without comparison to Christian procedures, perhaps for fear of being considered financially extravagant or physically delicate.

A counterargument came from their colleague Prins, who favored the experiment because “private synagogues, which are heated, attract more attendants . . . While hevra shuls are completely filled every morning, our community synagogues only draw a few.”<sup>87</sup> Improving the comfort level would not merely encourage more Jews to attend; it would also prevent them from using the conditions in communal synagogues as an

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<sup>85</sup> P. “Correspondentie,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 23: 26 (28 December, 1877): 3. The use of the word “churches” for synagogues was quite common; already in the late seventeenth century do gentiles refer to the synagogue as *jodenkerk*, or “Jews’ Church,” a term which Dutch Jewry adopted over time.

<sup>86</sup> *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 26: 23 (3 December, 1880): 3. The reference to Dutch Jews being “Orientals” is rather unusual and does not appear often in contemporary literature. Zeckendorf’s remark might have been meant as a light-hearted joke, but even if it was, it still suggests acculturated Jews considered themselves as somehow different than gentiles. I will discuss Jewish self-perception and public perception further along in the chapter.

<sup>87</sup> *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 6: 23 (3 December, 1880): 1

excuse to visit unofficial prayer houses. Polack replied that “in theory this sounds wonderful, but it will prove extremely difficult in practice.” While a symbolic amount of one guilder was allotted for the experiment and five members were assigned to look into the matter, the minutes of the November 1881 board meeting reported that “the unfavorable state of revenue has prevented important repairs to the Great Synagogue, the expansion of the free bath house, and the experiment to heat the synagogues.”<sup>88</sup>

Budgets were thus generally strained. For the entire second half of the nineteenth century the community spent the bulk of its annual revenue on three main expenses: poor relief, education, and interest on outstanding debts.<sup>89</sup> Community minutes repeatedly refer to “unfavorable conditions” that forced community leaders to “take the utmost care when determining which project to take on and to limit attention only to the most urgent cases, the postponement of which would work against the interest of the community . . . critical conditions render it currently advisable to let matters concerning building plans rest and suspend them until better times.”<sup>90</sup> Consequently, for years funds earmarked for building expenses remained limited to the maintenance and repair of existing structures, which included not merely synagogues, but also mikvaot, the seminary, orphanages, religious schools, and the cemetery.

The socio-economic make-up of Amsterdam Jewry came into play here as well. A small elite meant a small number of philanthropic endowments. When substantial gifts

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<sup>88</sup> GAA # 714-15: *Archieven van de Ned.-Isr. Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, 1669-1943*. “Ontwerp-Begrooting van Ontvangsten en Uitgaven ten behoeve der Nederlandsch-Israëlietische Hoofd-Synagoge te Amsterdam.” No. 74: Meeting of the Church Council, 17 November, 1881.

<sup>89</sup> See, among others, the annual reports of the *Nederlandsch Israëlietische Hoofd Synagoge* (Dutch-Jewish Main Synagogue, NIHS): GAA # O.1218: *Jaarverslagen NIHS*; Gemeentearchief # 714-15: *Archieven van de Ned.-Isr. Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, 1669-1943*: “Ontwerp-Begrooting van Ontvangsten en Uitgaven ten behoeve der Nederlandsch-Israëlietische Hoofd-Synagoge te Amsterdam.”

<sup>90</sup> GAA # 714-149: *Archieven van de Ned.-Isr. Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, 1669-1943*. Publication of the Church Council, 18 February, 1885.

were made, the funds usually went to poor relief or education; the building of a new synagogue was not a popular object for charity, in part because it was not considered urgent given the conditions in which most Amsterdam Jews lived. “Where do we find donations and bequests in the same fashion as in London, Paris, Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna etc., gifts of a hundred thousand or more?,” fumed an anonymous writer(s) in the *Jewish Weekly*, “where beautiful synagogues, funded by only one or a few men, emerge? When we want or need to build synagogues here, well alas! we have to beg for contributions . . . Considerable endowments are rarer than rare [and] are made only in support of the poor.”<sup>91</sup> Seemingly unaware that other metropolitan Jewish communities in Europe generally had more affluent Jews and less poor Jews, the author found the scarcity of philanthropic initiatives among the Dutch Jewish elite a “disgrace.”

The newly constructed Beth Midrash in the Rapenburger Street, which included a synagogue, was somewhat of an exception. Designed by the well-known architect G. B. Salm and his son Abraham Salm in 1882, the building was financed to a large extent by private donations, particularly by a fl. 20,000 gift from a local resident named S. Monk and his sister Ms. Leeuwenstein-Monk. The Beth Midrash, which had been an independent institution since 1755, began a large-scale fund-raising campaign after the Monks’ initial donation, raising another fl. 30,000. In 1883 the architecturally eclectic building, located in the heart of the Jewish neighborhood and in the same street as the orphanage for Jewish girls and the rabbinical seminary, was completed (see fig. 6). A private donation, rather than a communal initiative, was the incentive for building the

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<sup>91</sup> “De Interimaten,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 24: 43 (25 April, 1879): 1-2. The *NIW* reports that in 1885 a widow by the name of Mrs. I.E. Teixeira de Mattos and a couple named Mendes de Leon donated fl. 100,000 to the Sephardic community to build a new hospital and a retirement home for women. *NIW* 21: 25 (25 December, 1885): 2-3.

new synagogue. One might argue, however, that in this case the primary objective was the creation of a house of learning, not a house of worship. That the Beth Midrash included a synagogue, which provided room for 400 congregants, was an additional benefit to a community in need of more religious space.

The *Jewish Courier* reported in October 1883 that the synagogue was located in the “back building” [*achtergebouw*] of the Beth Midrash and measured approximately 39 by 39 feet. The interior adhered to a Romanesque theme, although it remained muted as “the purpose of the building demanded a simple and subtle tone, a sturdy [structure] without an overdose of ornaments.” The result was a “spacious, airy room lit by high windows, with amphitheater-like galleries on three sides and five gracious chandeliers, candelabras, and a beautiful Aron Kodesh placed in a niche that can be separated from the main space with an iron screen.”<sup>92</sup> The niche in which the Ark was placed was decorated with Oriental motifs, a somewhat unusual detail since Oriental architecture remained marginal on the Dutch scene. Father and son Salm, however, were known for their eclecticism, which they – and other eclectics – found a proper reflection of the kaleidoscopic nature of modern life. They might have found an Oriental frame a fitting nod to Jewish particularism.

Since the synagogue occupied only a small space in the Beth Midrash, and since it was located in the back of the building, it was not visible from the street. It remained a private space hidden from public view. The Beth Midrash as a whole, however, drew praise from Jewish observers. Salm’s use of iron and glass, the blend of Romanesque, Dutch Renaissance, and Classical elements created a consensus among reviewers that

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<sup>92</sup> “Beth Hamidrash Ets Chaim,” *Israelietische Nieuwsbode* 9: 13 (24 June, 1883): 1. *Israelietische Nieuwsbode* 9: 15 (5 October 1883); “De inwijding van het beth-hamidrasj te Amsterdam,” *NIW* 19: 11 (21 September, 1883): 1.

“the interior and exterior [could] be called handsome.”<sup>93</sup> The Beth Midrash might not have been as large, as expensive, and as visually dominant as religious structures built elsewhere in Europe, but many Jews considered it “a monumental gem for the Dutch Jewish community, for our city, a powerful historical witness that loudly communicates our present.”<sup>94</sup>

Embarking on new building projects was further complicated by Amsterdam’s high land prices. Due to the capital’s economic recovery and subsequent building boom in the post-1860 period, land prices increased significantly. While unimproved land within the city limits was sold for fl. 1.35 per square meter, land that was ready for construction rated fl. 7 in 1865 and fl. 8.50 in 1870. Five years later, argued the urban historian Arnold van der Valk, land in the Plantage district was sold on occasion for fl. 45 per square meter, which many found outrageous and unacceptable.<sup>95</sup> Rates in the city center, which included land in and around the Jewish neighborhood, averaged between fl. 20 and fl. 50 per square meter depending on location. Plots situated near a main street, canal, or square were more desirable and therefore sold for higher rates. Building a substantial, freestanding synagogue in an area close to where the majority of Jews lived thus required a serious financial investment – the land alone would have cost a small fortune. A similar escalation of prices occurred outside of the old city limits, where prices had doubled within only a few years. In the *Pijp* district, for instance, building plots sold between fl. 10 and fl. 15 per square meter in 1870, around fl. 20 in 1881, and more than

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<sup>93</sup> “Plechtige inwijding van het nieuwe Beth-Hamidrasj-gebouw alhier,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 29: 14 (28 September, 1993): 2.

<sup>94</sup> “Beth Hamidrash Ets Chaim,” *Israelietische Nieuwsbode* 9: 13 (24 juni, 1883): 1-3.

<sup>95</sup> Van der Valk, 574.

fl. 40 in 1883. Average prices around the Gerard Doustreet, where local Jews built a new hevra synagogue in 1892 – discussed in detail below – fluctuated between fl. 20 and fl. 25.

By the mid-1880s Jewish officials realized they could no longer properly maintain their seventeenth- and eighteenth century properties on their current budget. They risked having to rebuild a number of structures altogether if they remained unrenovated, which would, in the end, put an even bigger strain on community finances. What ensued was a pattern of board members proposing renovations and committees submitting reports, which were then rejected and shelved due to financial limitations. A report discussed at a community council meeting in August 1884, for instance, calculated that fl. 140,200 was required to repair community-owned properties, “an expense that encompasses almost our entire annual income.” The budget included, among other things, the rebuilding of the Lange Houtstraat synagogue, estimated at fl. 30,000. According to the *NIW* the structure, which was “no longer suitable for repair,” could be demolished and rebuilt on a larger scale if its unused backyard were included in the design.<sup>96</sup> Some, however, worried that the proposed expense “could exceed the community’s financial capacity,” especially because of current debts and “generally poor financial conditions.” A few weeks later, in September, the issue was discussed again, this time regarding the location of the synagogue: “If we propose to spend thirty thousand guilders, can’t we then find a more suitable location? The costs might be higher, but the results will be better.” One

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<sup>96</sup> “Ingrijpende voorstellen,” *Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten* 1: 8 (15 August, 1884): 1-2; “Ingrijpende voorstellen,” *Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten* 1: 11 (5 September, 1884): 1; *Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten* 1: 26 (19 December, 1884): 1; “De begrooting in verband met de bouw- en finantieele voorstellen,” *Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten* 1: 28 (2 January, 1885); “Verslag van het Kerkbestuur,” *Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten* 1: 37 (6 March, 1885): 1. The *Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten* was the continuation of the *Weekblad voor Israëlieten*. See also GAA # 714-149: *Archieven van de Ned.-Isr. Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, 1669-1943*: “Publikatie van de kerkeraad 18 February, 1885”; GAA # 714-151, no. 249: “Brief van het Kerkbestuur aan de Kerkeraad, 29 April 1886.”

committee member named Bottenheim even suggested “taking Paris and Cologne as an example,” the new synagogues of which he apparently found particularly inspiring. Compared to these landmarks, the Houtstraat synagogue, “even including the plot in backyard . . . would remain an unsightly, narrow building,”<sup>97</sup> a problem that might be solved by finding an alternative location.

The minutes of a December meeting, however, reveal that the investigation led to an adjustment in the building proposal, which now determined the Houtstraat and the Stroomarkt synagogues should be closed altogether – repeating an observation already made by board members in 1856 – and the Rapenburgerstraat synagogue instead should be enlarged at a cost of fl. 90,000. The community would need to take out a loan for fl. 175,000 at a 4 percent annual interest rate to cover this and additional projects. But a January article in the *NIW* entitled “The budget regarding our building- and finance proposals” subsequently reported that

the synagogue council has concluded, on the basis of a variety of unfavorable conditions, that this moment in time is utterly unsuitable for an increase in spending and for taking out a loan, and consequently decided to postpone all projects until better times. As a result of this decision item 56 on the agenda, ‘building maintenance,’ will receive fl. 10,000.

Frustrated with the lack of results, the *NIW* angrily replied “this is what I call creating redundant work! . . . This can continue on and on. Such settling of affairs is not nineteenth-century-like!” It also criticized the “peculiar” gap between Bottenheim’s idea of building a monumental synagogue in Amsterdam on a scale similar to that of Paris and the economic realities of the Dutch Jewish community, and suggested in disdain that Bottenheim had probably misread the number of zero’s in the proposed budget of fl.

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<sup>97</sup> GAA: # 714-149: “Brief van het Kerkbestuur aan de Kerkeraad, 15 September 1884 .” It is not clear which synagogues in particular Bottenheim referred to. He might have alluded to the new houses of worship at the Rue de la Victoire (1874), Rue des Tournelles (1875), and Rue Buffault (1877) in Paris, and the Glockengasse Synagogue (1861) in Cologne.

10,000. Over the next few years, however, this indecisiveness must have given way to some form of consensus as the 1892 budget report stated that “the considerable expenditures made for repair and maintenance to synagogues and other buildings have put community property in a fine state.” Indeed, they were in such a fine state that Jewish officials deemed it no longer necessary to employ the services of the community architect J. B. Salm and subsequently fired him.<sup>98</sup> While it is not entirely clear what eventually caused the shift, a loan of fl. 100,000 at a 4 percent annual interest rate had been taken out, which was spent over the course of five years (1886-1891) to restore many of the community’s public buildings, including the New, Waterloo Square, and Uilenburgerstreet synagogues.<sup>99</sup> It would take until the mid-1890s until the Lange Houtstraat synagogue was rebuilt, for which the former community architect G. B. Salm was contracted. With its modest eclectic exterior, traditional floor plan, and attachment on both sides to residences, this synagogue continued the pattern of synagogue building that had been established over the course of the eighteenth century.

The Jewish community thus proved vigilant with regard to implementing building initiatives. This does not mean, however, it did not build. It did, but for many years synagogues were not priorities. The majority of building funds was spent on projects that provided much-needed social services for a largely working-class population, such as the new Jewish hospital and a home for the elderly. The early 1870s and early 1880s also witnessed the building of two new meat halls – one for the Ashkenazim in the Nieuwe

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<sup>98</sup> GAA # 714-149: “Plan van Aflossing eener 4% Geldleening ten last der Ned. Isr. Hoofdsynagoge, groot fl. 100,000, getekend 16 juni 1884 door het Kerkbestuur.” “Er is in totaal fl. 168,088.51 uitgegeven aan bouwwerken over een periode van 5 jaar (incl. gewoon onderhoud aan synagogen, badhuizen, scholen, vleeshallen aan de Nieuwe Amstelstraat en begraafplaatsen, niet jaarlijks terugkomend onderhoud, en nieuwe werken,” GAA # 714-158: “Overzicht der Bouwwerken der Ned. Isr. Hoofdsynagoge over 1886-1890 (1891).” The explanatory memorandum that accompanied the 1891 budget announced the “honorable discharge of Mr. G. B. Salm as community architect.”

<sup>99</sup> GAA # 714-158: “Overzicht der Bouwwerken der Ned. Isr. Hoofdsynagoge over 1886-1890 (1891).”



Amstelstraat and another for the Sephardic community in the Nieuwe Kerkstraat. The hospital, built by Izak Gosschalk in a Dutch Renaissance design, cost a total of fl. 200,000, fl. 50,000 of which was provided by the city of Amsterdam (see fig. 7). It was this building that the *NIW* called “a temple,” one that was “dedicated to the love of mankind . . . of which the Dutch Jewish community can be proud.”<sup>100</sup>

### **Hevra-synagogues**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Amsterdam-Jewish cityscape was enriched not by monumental temples, but by hevrot. When demand for additional seating was not met with new communal buildings, many Jews took matters into their own hands by “founding small prayer houses or prayer rooms to satisfy their religious needs.”<sup>101</sup> Community officials were uneasy with this trend as they could not control the activities taking place inside of independent synagogues. However, they condoned their existence because there was no realistic alternative, suggesting instead “not to praise such organizations.”<sup>102</sup> They offered worshipers additional, temporary spaces during the High Holidays when demand was particularly high, but for daily or weekly services they reluctantly allowed independent congregations to take the initiative. Occasionally someone would grumble about this state of affairs. In a letter entitled “Isn’t this inappropriate?,” one reader wrote:

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<sup>100</sup> “Plechtige inwijding van het Nederlandsch-Israëlietische ziekenhuis te Amsterdam,” *Nieuwsblad voor Israëlieten* 1: 25 (12 December, 1884): 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 6: 18 (29 October, 1880): 1.

<sup>102</sup> *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 7: 3 (15 July, 1881): 3. This willingness to tolerate *hevrot* in Amsterdam contrasts sharply with the hostile attitude of the *consistoire* in Paris. The latter cracked down on these intermediate bodies of power as they undermined the attempts to centralize Jewish organizational life. For more on this topic, see Phyllis Cohen Albert, *The Modernization of French Jewry: Consistory and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Brandeis University Press, 1977).

[T]his year religious services for New Year's and the Day of Atonement will be held in a locale that – why shouldn't we be clear – for several days in the week is dedicated to immorality . . . indecent dancing, indecent songs etc. etc., all meant to arouse the passion of youngsters; where ladies, whose behavior is highly suspect, speculate with the desires and wallets of so many who find themselves weak enough to be caught in the snares of those *bacchantinnen* [drunken revelers] . . . And this company will then make room for a speculator to put in a *hechal* containing holy books and create a quasi-synagogue? . . . That some Jews, due to the lack of synagogue space, resort to alternative locales such as schools and meeting rooms, fine; but that some compromise their honor, which they owe to their faith, that is just appalling.<sup>103</sup>

Community leaders acknowledged that the situation was not ideal, but left it at that. For instance Philip Elte, editor of the *NIW*, argued in November 1880 that the “hevra-problem” jeopardized the unity of the Amsterdam Jewish community and reduced its annual revenue. In practically every street with a significant Jewish population, he wrote, one can find one and sometimes two of these synagogues, each of which with its own spiritual leader. He also acknowledged, however, that purchasing a seat in one of the community synagogues might take years and that the real solution would be a new building initiative.<sup>104</sup> However, since these were “unfavorable times, unsuitable to embark on large building projects,” the prudent solution remained to “adapt to this uncomfortable situation and postpone building plans until better times.”<sup>105</sup> For the time being, *hevrot*, while problematic, were the only possible substitute.

The lack of space, however, was only one of several incentives for Jews to found a *hevra*; there were additional benefits that rendered independence, including a private synagogue, highly attractive. Convenience, for instance, played an important role. For congregants from Ahabath Chesed [love of kindness], the only Sephardic *hevra* in the city, the walking distance from their residences in the Weesperzijde neighborhood to their community synagogue was considered too far, especially for daily prayers. The

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<sup>103</sup> “Is dat niet ongepast?,” *NIW* 16: 5 (13 August, 1880): 3.

<sup>104</sup> *NIW* (12 November, 1880). See also C. Reijnders, “Op zoek naar oude *chewre-sjoeltjes* in Amsterdam (slot),” *Hakehilla* 34: 1 (September 1988): 16.

<sup>105</sup> GAA # 714-149: *Archieven van de Nederlandsch-Israëlietische Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, 1669-1943*: council minutes 18 February, 1885.

hevra, explained their bylaws, was founded “for convenience sake, particularly for the elderly, who would still like to practice their faith, but for whom the walk to the synagogue at the J. D. Meijer square is too lengthy.”<sup>106</sup> For others it was not so much distance as the commencement time of morning services that encouraged independence. This is precisely how Rino Oesefillo [joy and prayer], founded in February 1878, gained its nickname the Matrozensjoel, or “sailors’ shul.” Jewish merchants who came ashore early in the morning at the berth of the packet-firm Te Enkel and Oomes, located along the Amstel river, could attend eight o’clock services at Rino Oesefillo in the New Church Street, whereas they would be too late for morning prayers if they had to walk to the nearest community synagogue. As for the Rechit Tov [Good Beginning], founded in October 1855 and located at the Korte Houtstraat in the middle of the Jewish neighborhood: Carolus Reijnders suggests it was related to the outbreak of cholera and measles that same year, which affected the Jewish district particularly hard due to its population density and unsanitary conditions.<sup>107</sup> The increased death rate spurred the desire among some local Jews to simplify the strict regulations regarding the saying of kadish to which the community synagogues adhered. A hevra synagogue allowed the relaxation of such formalities and “the settling of matters amongst ourselves.”<sup>108</sup> A last, but not insignificant, convenience concerned the heating of the buildings. Due to limited budgets, the community synagogues were not heated until late in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>106</sup> Reijnders, “Op zoek naar oude chewre-sjoeltjes in Amsterdam,” *Hakehilla* 33: 1 (September 1987): 31. See also J. J. F. W. van Agt, “Synagogen: Monumenten van het Nederlands Jodendom,” *Spiegel Historiae* 5: 9 (September, 1970): 477-484; J. J. F. W. van Agt and E. van Voolen, *Synagogen in Nederland* (Hilversum: Gooi & Sticht, 1988). I have remained faithful to the Dutch Hebrew spelling with regard to the names of Amsterdam *hevrot*, the translation of which is given in parentheses.

<sup>107</sup> Reijnders, “Op zoek naar oude chewre-sjoeltes in Amsterdam, afl. 5,” *Hakehilla* 33: 5 (Maart 1988): 16.

<sup>108</sup> *De Gerard Doustraat-synagoge in woord en beeld: Een sjoel met een verleden en een toekomst!* I thank Abby Israëls, the secretary of the *Gerard Dou* synagogue in Amsterdam, for giving me this brochure, which describes in short the history of the *hevra*.

For many Amsterdam Jews attending services at a heated synagogue located just around the corner from where they lived was highly preferable to a cold one at a further distance.

In addition to the convenience factor it was the low cost of membership that encouraged the formation of independent congregations. The regulations of Mewackshy Jousher [seekers of righteousness] fixed the weekly contribution at seven cents<sup>109</sup>; it was six cents for the members of Rechit Tov, after an initial fee of fifty cents and a payment of ten cents for the booklet explaining the regulations.<sup>110</sup> Agoedas Ahoewiem [loving union], which convened in the Uilenburgerstraat, allowed members to reserve a seat in their synagogue if they paid fl. 1.50 per year in addition to their contribution of 6.5 cents per week. For Jews with a small income, this was an affordable alternative to the communal synagogue, where the membership fees were considerably higher. That these moderate fees also extended to religious services, enabling congregants to fulfill a mitsvah at less of a financial sacrifice and consequently be more involved in the service, only increased the attraction of hevrot.

A last motivation for founding an independent congregation had its roots in conflict, although this was rare in Amsterdam, where the vast majority of hevrot adhered to the same religious orthodoxy as the main community. Only Mewackshy Jousher, whose members were mostly stock-brokers, is suspected of having its origins in communal dispute. The Dutch-Jewish historian Jaap Meijer maintains that the appointment of a hazan from Gnesen, Poland, in the Great Synagogue in 1856 generated such objections among these men that they seceded out of protest the following year. Whether it was internal friction alone that caused the secession, however, is questionable.

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<sup>109</sup> Brochure Rosenthaliana Regl. C-21: *Reglementen van het Israëlitisch Godsdienstig Genootschap Mewackshy Jousher te Amsterdam*, p. 13.

<sup>110</sup> Brochure Rosenthaliana Regl. D-15: *Reglement der Vereeniging Rechit Tob*.

That their synagogue in the Nieuwe Hoogstraat was less than half a mile from the stock-exchange and therefore conveniently located for afternoon prayers most likely played a role as well.

Reijnders counted thirty hevrot in Amsterdam before World War I, the majority of which were founded between 1860 and 1900 and located in or bordering the Jewish neighborhood. Practically all of them began as prayer rooms in private homes and were later remodeled into larger prayer houses to which new façades were added. They were always part of a block of residences and therefore never freestanding. The reasons for their modesty were not dissimilar to those regarding early modern synagogue architecture in Europe: the congregation had limited funds to build a house of worship – one of the main attractions of becoming a member of a hevra were the low financial responsibilities, and putting the congregation in serious debt by building extravagantly would only defeat the purpose. Moreover, investing in rental property was an enterprise not without risk, not merely because the owner might not renew the contract, but also because the growth or decline of the congregation itself could require a change of location.

This is not to say members did not take pride in their building. These Jews did not necessarily share Yehuda Leib Gordon's belief that only the internal aspect of Jewish ritual mattered and that Jews "were completely indifferent to the external appearance of their houses of worship . . . as long as it did not contain anything shocking, tendentious, or anti-Jewish."<sup>111</sup> In our case the Star of David and Hebrew inscriptions were usually part of the exterior arrangement, as were playfully eclectic window designs, entrance ways, and gables. Moreover, the Jewish press reported that Jews attached Dutch flags to

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<sup>111</sup> Yehuda Leib Gordon made this remark in a debate over the construction of the St. Petersburg synagogue in the late 1870s. He is quoted in Benjamin Nathans' *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 157.

their synagogues during celebrations and inaugurations, thereby drawing the attention of passersby to their presence and integrating their existence into public life. It does appear, however, that more attention was paid to activities taking place inside the building rather than its public appearance. Architectural descriptions, for instance, never surfaced in Jewish newspaper notices of new hevra synagogues – some of which did not even include information about their location. While this lack of interest might have been related to the unofficial status of hevrot on which the press did not want to dwell, new monumental synagogues abroad also received little attention. Architecture also did not constitute a topic of interest for locals submitting letters to the press, which dealt more with the conduct of Jews inside the building than with the latter's public aesthetic. The architect designing the façade of hevra synagogues, in other words, most likely had free-reign as long as he remained within a certain budget and included a number of appropriate Jewish symbols in the composition.

The hevra Rino Oesefillo is a case in point (fig. 8). The *NIW* reported on September 15, 1882, that it had inaugurated a new prayer room a week before, although it did not include any information on its whereabouts. Five years later we learn that a local resident named Salomon van Raap received permission from the Amsterdam city council to transform three floors of his building at the Waterloo Square no. 10 into a synagogue for the Jewish congregation of Rino Oesefillo, and that the community moved into its new rented quarters in January 1888. The first and second floor were reconstructed into the main prayer room, which measured approximately 45 by 20 feet, a second room in the back of the building (25 by 12 feet) and a small hallway (15 by 12 feet). The third floor was reserved for galleries, which appeared on all four sides of the building, with

only a partial interruption on the eastern wall for the Ark. Women, however, could only sit in the gallery on the western wall and were concealed from view by a Baroque screen. The synagogue, which was located in the heart of the Jewish neighborhood, seated 200 men and 20 women, all of whom contributed 10 cents in weekly membership fees.<sup>112</sup> As for the exterior, its brick and white stone façade was dominated by an arched doorway, flanked on both sides by two narrow doors that offered access to the galleries. The side doors were crowned with classical white stone ornaments that included the years 5648 and 1888, above which two arched windows displayed in Hebrew the name of the hevra and the Star of David. The eclectic façade further displayed 9 square windows decorated with an arched brick pattern and a typically Dutch “bell” gable, which was topped with a narrow, metal anemometer.

Since Jews occasionally used only one or two floors of a multi-story building, it was not uncommon for architects to be asked to design only partial façades. In the case of Bet Ja’akov [House of Jacob], for instance, their prayer room in the Commelinstraat 114 encompassed the first and second floor of a multistory building. The 1881 blueprint of the unknown architect who was hired to reconstruct the existing space of no. 114 illustrates new Gothic-inspired windows and doorways on the first floor, while the remainder of the building remained untouched (see fig. 10). This prayer room, which was inaugurated in July 1881, was abandoned by Jewish worshipers only months later, when the congregation merged with another hevra and moved to a new location in the Wagenaarstraat.

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<sup>112</sup> See J. F. van Agt, *Synagogen in Amsterdam* (’s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1974), 72-73; Reijnders, “Op zoek naar oude chewre-sjoeltjes in Amsterdam,” *Hakehilla* 33: 6 (April 1988): 13. The former building of *Rino Oeseffillo* was demolished in 1964.

The façades – or partial façades – of independent synagogues thus generally displayed a mélange of styles, from eclectic mixes combining Gothic and Romanesque elements to purely Dutch Renaissance designs. However, they tended to blend into the existing cityscape, mostly due to their use of typical Dutch gables and of domestic building materials such as red and yellow brick. Furthermore, since most of these synagogues were incorporated into already existing buildings, the main contours of which remained in harmony with the structures that surrounded them, they generally did not stand out. While most street façades thus freely displayed Jewish symbols, an observer had to pay close attention or the presence of a synagogue would go unnoticed.<sup>113</sup> This modesty was certainly related to the community’s financial status, but it also grew out of the shared belief that an exuberant display of “Jewishness” was considered unnecessary. Hevra synagogues emerged predominantly in the densely populated Jewish neighborhood, a setting in which staking a claim to a Jewish presence seemed superfluous. Moreover, as the Jews’ legal status had been secure since the late 1700s and as a Jewish subculture was compatible with the larger, pillarized structure of Dutch society, there was no need to make public claims in favor of legal and social equality. In other words, just as there was no need to hide Jewish prayer houses, there was no desire to advertise their presence, to employ architecture to make a bold architectural statement of equality, or to impress the Jews’ “worthiness” upon Dutch society. These were practical buildings for working-class Jews, unrelated to the public display of bourgeois aspirations. The

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<sup>113</sup> This partially explains why the synagogue of Tesjoengat Israel in the Gerard Doustraat, the Dutch Renaissance façade of which merged with the surrounding residences, remained unharmed during World War II as the Nazi occupiers remained unaware of its existence. “That the Germans left the synagogue alone,” wrote M. Kielich in the Dutch periodical the *NRC Handelsblad*, “was caused solely by the building’s exterior, which look[ed] more like a warehouse than a synagogue” (*NRC Handelsblad*, 28 February, 1998). O. M. Lehman, whose father had been a member of the congregation before the war, agreed and added that “no one walking by would suspect that behind the rather boring, inconspicuous façade lay a beautiful shul.” See O. M. Lehmann, *Faith at the brink* (New York: Lehmann Books, 1996).



narrative these synagogues convey instead is the Jews' familiarity with a wide variety of aesthetic flavors – be it Dutch Renaissance or an eclectic mix of Romanesque, Byzantine, even Gothic elements – but also their comparative insouciance toward using public art to its full potential. Amsterdam synagogues, then, played only a walk-on role in the history of nineteenth-century European synagogue architecture, although they certainly did contribute to the city's rich religious and cultural landscape.

### **The Gerard Doustraat Synagogue<sup>114</sup>**

One of the few purpose-built synagogues that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century was the hebra synagogue in the Gerard Doustraat, built in 1892 in the south-eastern neighborhood of the Pijp.<sup>115</sup> This district was part of the city's urban expansion projects between the 1870s and 1890s and became highly popular; while in 1869 1,423 people lived in the Pijp, in 1899 this number had risen to 49,703.<sup>116</sup> Jewish families settled here as well, especially after the Cape era of the early 1870s when higher

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<sup>114</sup> Gerard Dou (1613-1675), born in Leiden, was a pupil of Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. Many streets in the *Pijp* district were named after Dutch painters, such as the Albert Cuyp Street, Jan Steen Street, and Frans Hals Street.

<sup>115</sup> The origin of the name *De Pijp* [literally “pipe” or “tube”] remains somewhat of a mystery. It might refer to one of the main ditches that used to run through the area, the *Zaagmolen* ditch, which was filled as part of the urban extension plans of the 1870s. In Dutch a long and narrow water way is sometimes referred to as a *pijp*. Ton Heijdra suggests the name could also be related to the long pipes of the local steam-driven saw-mills, which for a while remained part of the urban scene in the new district before they were torn down. In any event, the *Pijp* became the popular name for this new district, which formerly had been known as the YY, its alphabetical reference on the city's blueprint-designs. Ton Heijdra, *De Albert Cuyp: Geschiedenis van een bruisende markt* (Amsterdam: De Milliano, 1994), 15. See also Ariane Hendriks and Jaap van Velzen, *A Short History of Jewish Amsterdam: New and Old Jewish Neighborhoods, 1900-1944* (Amstelveen: Jewish Historical Museum, 2004).

<sup>116</sup> Reijnders, “Op zoek naar oude chewre-sjoeltjes in Amsterdam,” *Hakehilla* 33: 8 (July 1988): 20. This dramatic population increase in the *Pijp* was related to the disappearance of the city-gates, which facilitated the flow of traffic in- and out of the city-center and allowed for new settlements outside of the *Singelgracht* boundary. Amsterdam's seventeenth-century city-gates were demolished between 1830 and 1865, although some gate locations continued to serve as control posts for the collection of import taxes, tariffs, and duties, and were recognizable by a fence and a small custom's house. After the abolition of municipal tolls in 1865, however, these last barriers between Amsterdam and its peripheral regions disappeared as well. It is therefore no coincidence that 1865 marked a dramatic turning point in the city's building plans, which soon attracted large numbers of residents to its new suburbs.

wages enabled some Jews to overcome the problem of higher rents and move out of the congested inner city quarters into better homes. The Pijp was especially attractive for Jews as a growing number of diamond-polishing factories began operating in the area – 18 in total by 1890, employing approximately 1800 people. Similar to the Jewish neighborhood, the Pijp was economically mixed. According to the Amsterdam street registry, the Gerard Doustraat accommodated diamond cutters, butchers, haulers, book-binders, carpenters, one stage-actor, painters, and tailors – some of whom were Jews and some of whom were Christians.<sup>117</sup> Hemony Lane, on the other hand, attracted residents of a higher class, as did the streets around the Sarphati Park on the outer border, which “rimmed the district with gold.”<sup>118</sup> The Pijp thus copied earlier settlement patterns, in which neighborhoods were a potpourri of socio-economically and religiously diverse families, the better-off living in residences along the canals and the working-class occupying multistory homes in side-streets.

The Gerard Doustreet was inhabited by relatively large families, many of whom moved quite frequently to different addresses in the immediate surrounding area. A promotion, the loss of a job or a spouse, or the birth of a new child influenced affordability and residential mobility patterns. Clara Vaz Diaz and her seven children, for instance, moved from no. 192 to no. 147 after her husband David Cortissos, a diamond polisher, died in 1892. A few doors down, at no. 196, lived a butcher named Meijer Moses Meijer with his wife and five children, right above the Christian carpenter Stephanus Scholten and his family of seven. Until 1892 the third floor was inhabited by Levie Porcelijn, a merchant, his wife Anna van Praag, and their six children, after which

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<sup>117</sup> GAA: *Bevolkingsregister 1875-1892*: Gemeentearchief # 5006, deel 645, blad 1-28, fiche 6912.

<sup>118</sup> Rob Pistor, *A City in Progress: Physical Planning in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening Amsterdam, 1994), 40.

they moved to the somewhat better Lepelstraat [Spoon Street]. In their place came Mozes Korper, a diamond cutter, and his family.<sup>119</sup> These Jews all lived a stone's throw away from the Gerard Dou synagogue, which emerged at no. 238 in 1892.

The Gerard Doustreet was (and still is) a long and straight street alongside which stood rectangular, enclosed blocks of buildings four-stories high in a neo-Renaissance design (see fig. 11). It deviated from the conventional Amsterdam street plan, a fact that did not go unnoticed by locals, some of whom complained that the new type of street design left pedestrians bored and uninspired as there were no “surprises” in a street without curves and corners. “Practically everyone agrees the old inner-city triumphs over the new quarters,” wrote “P.” in 1890. “When I walk through newly-built streets, where everything is symmetrical, I see compasses and rulers everywhere. Everything is regular, square. Arithmetic has killed the aesthetic – that is the nineteenth century.”<sup>120</sup> Others were concerned about the increased health risks that long, straight roads posed, particularly with respect to strong winds. Despite popular discontent, however, street plans like these became a feature of the new working class districts that emerged outside the Singelgracht, such as the Pijp, the Dapper-, Kinker-, and Staatslieden neighborhoods, all of which followed the lines of former agricultural ditches, producing long, narrow, straight roads.

Initially settling in this area had presented Jews with a problem. The expansion of the city and the abolition of import taxes had led to the disappearance of city walls,

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<sup>119</sup> GAA: *Bevolkingsregister* 1875-1892 # 5006, deel 645, blad 1-28, fiche 6912. For residential mobility patterns in Amsterdam between 1890 and 1940, see in Jan Kok, Kees Mandemakers, and Henk Wals, “City Nomads: Changing Residence as a Coping Strategy, Amsterdam, 1890-1940,” *Social Science History* 29: 1 (Spring 2005): 15-43.

<sup>120</sup> P., “Over Grachten en Stegen in Oud- en Nieuw Amsterdam,” (13 February, 1890): 36-37. This article appeared in the Hartkamp collection at the Amsterdam Community Archives: *GAA Persverzameling Hartkamp* 1 (1840-1915).

drawbridges, and city-gates, and thereby to the dismantling of the *eruv*, the enclosed space within which Jews were allowed to carry objects on Shabbat. The city council, however, agreed in 1866 to meet the requests of the Jewish community to re-establish the boundaries of the *eruv* by creating barriers in the Pijp district – a response that would be virtually inconceivable in central European cities. That same year the parnasim of both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities expressed their gratitude to the city of Amsterdam for “placing chains at distinct places.”<sup>121</sup>

It was in this new, largely working-class district that local Jews founded the hevra *Tesjoengat Israel* [*Hulpe Israels*], mostly out of convenience as a brisk walk to the nearest community synagogue took close to forty minutes. Moreover, admitted the *NIW*, the lack of communal building initiatives encouraged a “do-it-yourself attitude, which the majority of the Jews [in the Pijp] have taken to heart.”<sup>122</sup> Religious Jews initially convened in residential homes, but in 1878 they inaugurated a “neat and graceful prayer house” in the Quellijn Street. Eight years later the *Jewish Weekly* notified its readers that the small community moved again, this time to the nearby Jacob van Campenstraat. All of these locations were private rooms that had been transformed into small prayer houses of which, unfortunately, no visual documentation exists.

We do know, however, that 1886 marked the official founding of the hevra, that its main goal was to “offer religious services, lectures, and religious education,” and that

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<sup>121</sup> See Reijnders, 82. The *eruv* refers to a fence – either real or symbolic – that surrounds the Jewish neighborhood, allowing Jews to carry items within its boundaries on Shabbat. According to traditional Judaism, it is prohibited to remove items from an enclosed space that is private property to an open space that is public property. By creating an enclosed area, either through natural boundaries such as river banks or strategically placed ropes or wires, an open space is converted into common space, permitting Jews to carry objects from one place to another.

<sup>122</sup> *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 31: 10 (30 August, 1895). The name *Tesjoengat Israel*, or Assistance or Aid to Israel, was derived from Jeremia 3, verse 23. The *hevra* came to the aid of the Jews in the *Pijp* by offering them an appropriate place to congregate for prayer and celebration.

membership was unlimited. Members over the age of 18, men as well as women, were required to contribute 10 cents a week in membership dues.<sup>123</sup> We also learn the building committee consisted of five men: Isaac van Saxon (merchant), Abraham van der Woude (butcher), David Jesaija Koker (carrier), Isaac Rood (cantor) and Heiman de Haas (commission-agent). In 1890, these committee members sent repeated requests to the City of Amsterdam to obtain a plot of land in the Gerard Dou street, for which they received permission on March 15, 1891. The City had only recently come into possession of the plot through a land exchange with the previous owners, and welcomed the opportunity to lease it to Tesjoengat Israel, who signed a long-term lease with the option to buy for the annual sum of fl. 287. A few months later, in October, the community acquired a building permit and contracted the Jewish architect Emanuel Marcus Rood (1851-1929) to design a new synagogue, one that also included a classroom for religious education.<sup>124</sup> The location of the building was thus determined by a combination of Jewish settlement patterns in the Pijp district and the availability of an appropriately-sized plot that could be purchased in the future.

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<sup>123</sup> *De Gerard Doustraat-synagoge in woord en beeld: Een sjoel met een verleden en een toekomst!* This booklet is unpublished, and I'm indebted to Abby Israels, the secretary of the Gerard Dou Synagogue, who generously allowed me to make a copy.

<sup>124</sup> In 1890-91 the City of Amsterdam acquired a number of parcels located along the Gerard Dou street, one of which was purchased from a private construction company named "Nederland" and another that was obtained through a land exchange with the Glasbergen family. The latter had owned a sawmill known as De Kieviet, which stood on the very location on which the Gerard Dou synagogue would be built. The mill had become useless after the city filled up the canal in the late 1880s and was torn down. According to an act signed on March 5, 1891, the City granted the Jewish congregation Tesjoengat Israel a fifty-year lease for parcel B8142. On June 16, 1892, the hevra purchased the land for fl. 7,175. Tesjoengat Israel, however, continued to face financial challenges. In a general meeting in August 1895, one of its members again expressed his desire for the main Jewish community to take over the synagogue. "We are entitled to a religious life," he said, "perhaps the synagogue board will realize this and take over control." The latter, however, kept aloof from accepting additional financial responsibilities. The only time the Gerard Dou synagogue was administered by the main synagogue was between the end of World War II and 1968, after which it regained its independence. The synagogue had remained unnoticed by Nazi occupiers exactly because of the building's conformity to its immediate surroundings and was completely intact in 1945. Services were held two weeks after liberation, on May 19, 1945.

Leasing parcel B8142 in the Gerard Dou street, hiring an architect, and financing the construction of a new building, however, proved to be a highly ambitious undertaking for a small hevra whose members were not wealthy. Overwhelmed, the building committee approached the board of the main synagogue for aid. “[We] turn to you in an almost desperate position to ask for help and assistance!” stated a letter of December 5, 1890. “We humbly request you purchase fl. 4000 in interest-free shares or provide a second mortgage for the same amount so as to allow us to build our synagogue.”<sup>125</sup> Aware of the board’s disapproval of hevrot, the building committee defended its appeal by arguing that Tesjoengat Israel was exempt due to its location “in the new urban districts far away from the Jewish neighborhood,” which rendered visits to communal synagogues physically impossible for some Jews. “Our need is so strong and so urgent,” the letter continued, “not merely to provide religious education for our children, but also to possess a synagogue of our own for the 300 Jewish families in this district, that we trust you will cooperate with our endeavors.” The parnasim, however, were less than enthusiastic about Tesjoengat Israel and were not persuaded that its location automatically entitled it to be subsidized. They refused to collaborate in the building of the new synagogue, although they did offer a modest fl. 200 contribution to “the religious education of Jewish children of parents living in the Pijp, represented by the organization Tesjoengat Israel.”<sup>126</sup> What the building committee referred to as the “struggle to erect a new synagogue” thus proved to be more difficult than expected, not because of drawn-out

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<sup>125</sup> J. van Sanen, H. de Haag, and J. Rood, “*Aan den Grooten Kerkeraad der Ned. Isr. Hoofdsynagoge te Amsterdam, 1890*” (letter dated 5 December, 1890). GAA: 714, #157: *Notulen en Bijlagen 1890*. The subsequent quotations used in this paragraph derive from the same letter.

<sup>126</sup> GAA: O. 1218: “*Jaarverslagen Nederlandsch-Israëlietische Hoofdsynagoge. Verslag van 1 October 1892 tot 30 September 1893.*” GAA: # 714-157: *Archieven van de Ned.-Isr. Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, 1669-1943, “Notulen 1890s.”*

bureaucratic formalities or objections from Christian city councils, but because of the unwillingness of the Jewish community to support the “unofficial” effort of working-class Jews.

The congregation must have found alternative sources of funding since it began construction in 1891 and inaugurated the new building on June 3, 1892. What emerged was a modest but charming neo-Renaissance structure enclosed by residential buildings that was built a few feet away from the street (fig. 12). The architect used red bricks for the façade, interrupted by white horizontal bands, a feature of the Dutch Renaissance style that was referred to in local parlance as the *speklagen*, or bacon, motif. The façade also featured two large arched windows, above which a small round window displayed a white Star of David. On the ground floor two small square windows, adorned with the brick arches so typical of Emanuel Rood, flanked the main doorway, which was crowned with a white classical tympanum. A second doorway, which offered access to the women’s galleries, appeared on the right side of the building in an identical setting as the bottom windows. Two small, white towers embellished the sides of the pointed roof, which was topped with a horizontal beam and covered with dark-colored tiles. The interior of the prayer room, which measured approximately 25 by 40 feet, featured a traditional Ashkenazic floor plan, i.e., a central bimah surrounded on three sides by oak wood benches, an Aron Kodesh placed in a niche on the south-eastern wall, women’s galleries with partial screens, and a wooden, vaulted ceiling. Additional light entered the room through a large, arched stain-glass window behind the ark.

The architect Emanuel Rood was well-known in the Jewish community. He had been the master builder of the new Beth Midrash Ets Chaim, designed by father and son

Salm, between 1881 and 1883. Rood, the son of a Jewish merchant, had been schooled to be a carpenter in The Hague and had received no formal architectural training, but he worked himself up to become a respectable architect in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Amsterdam. In 1887 he helped build the diamond factory Flora, also located in the Gerard Doustraat, in a Dutch Renaissance design. Jewish workers from the Flora factory often visited the Gerard Dou synagogue down the street, which caused the latter to be known in local parlance as the *diamantsjoeltje*, or “little diamond shul.” Rood was also involved in designing the Jewish old men’s home Ohel Jitschok [home of Isaac] in the Weesperstraat (1893), which also included a small prayer room for its Jewish residents. He became the main architect of the Amsterdam Jewish community in 1895, a post he held until 1925 when Harry Elte, the architect of the Jacob Obrecht synagogue (1928) took over.<sup>127</sup>

Rood was an ardent supporter of the Dutch Renaissance style, which he and other advocates believed constituted *the* Dutch national style. After decades of perceived aesthetic colonization, particularly through French influences, architects began looking for an artistic expression that represented Holland at its best.<sup>128</sup> Rood was convinced that a true national aesthetic could be found in the nation’s rich history, particularly the seventeenth century, when Holland was at its economic and cultural zenith, producing

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<sup>127</sup> GAA 714 – 1095, # 69: Letter written by the council of the main synagogue on June 16, 1895. The 1884 members list of the Dutch Society for the Promotion of Architecture lists Emanuel Rood as a master carpenter, but in 1890 he is registered as a *bouwkundige*, i.e. an architect. Rood was also involved in renewing the interior of a synagogue in Monnickendam (1894) and designed, in collaboration with Harry Elte, a new Jewish hospital in the Jacob Obrechtstraat in 1916. In 1895 he reconstructed a small hebra synagogue at the Weesper Square 15 in Amsterdam.

<sup>128</sup> T. Sanders, for instance, spoke in 1882 of the *vernederende vormenslavernij* [humiliating slavery to forms] which had been imposed on Holland for most of the nineteenth century. T. Sanders, “Stylmanie,” *Bouwkundig Weekblad: Orgaan van de Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Bouwkunst* 2: 24 (15 June, 1882): 317-320. An anonymous contributor agreed and added that the Dutch had begun to refocus “on the historic and national art forms of the seventeenth century in order to lay the basis for an independent and national development of art and industry.” See “Oud-Hollandsche Bouwstijl,” *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 1-2: 50 (13 April, 1882): 269-270.



such great architectural gems as the city hall on the Dam Square or the Mauritshuis [Maurits House] in The Hague. These buildings, suggested one contemporary in the *Daily News*, possessed qualities he believed everyone wished to possess, i.e., they were “modest, unpretentious, natural, but charming, friendly; occasionally stately, but never grandiose, never pompous. Like country and people, like art, and so too like architecture. In any case, this style is *ours*, our very own.”<sup>129</sup> For people like Rood, the picturesque architecture of the Golden Age, also referred to as “Old Dutch,” became the representative of the “true national character,” a cultural expression very much in line with growing nationalist sentiments visible on the Dutch scene.

Some art historians have argued that the popularity of the Dutch Renaissance reflected the desire on the part of many professionals to reconstruct a new Golden Age in Holland following an unfortunate economic malaise, foreign occupation, and the secession of Belgium. This yearning for rebirth explains to a great extent the proliferation of government and university buildings, philanthropic institutions, and healthcare facilities in Dutch Renaissance design. They were the product of an intensifying *vaderlandsch gevoel*, of strong “sentiments for the fatherland,” that found expression in picturesque seventeenth century-style compositions that incorporated clock- or stepped gables, red brick façades with contrasting horizontal white sandstone bands, wrought-iron ornaments, and integrated brick arches above square window displays.<sup>130</sup> The historicizing of these neo-movements and the nationalist sentiments attached to them was

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<sup>129</sup> J. A. M. Mensinga, “Blik van eenen ouden Hollander op Amsterdam,” *Nieuws van de Dag* (2 November, 1883), in the Hartkamp Collection: GAA *Persverzameling Hartkamp* 1 [1840-1915], 23-24.

<sup>130</sup> Rijkscommissie voor de Monumentenzorg, *Jongere Bouwkunst: Amsterdam binnen de Singelgracht (1850-1940). Advies van de Rijkscommissie voor de Monumentenzorg, afdeling II van de Monumentenraad, inzake de inventarisatie en selectie van jongere bouwkunst* ('s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1984), 31. See also H. J. F. de Roy van Zuydewijn, *Amsterdamse Bouwkunst 1815-1940* (Amsterdam, 1981); H. Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam, deel 6: 'Opgaand getij 1848-1925'* (Utrecht and Amsterdam, 1973).

not an exclusively Dutch phenomenon, but was instead part of a larger European trend. As the *Architectural Weekly* informed its readers in 1882, “there has been a return in almost all countries . . . towards the historical and national artistic art styles of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in order to lay the foundation for a more independent development of national art and industry. The power of the nationalist passions that have inspired our century and that now appear to redouble their control . . . has now already unmistakably exerted its influence in the field of art as well.”<sup>131</sup> The cultural ideal of the Renaissance, which esteemed rationality, individuality, and humanism, and which conceived of art as contributing to the moral improvement of man, was believed to be particularly suitable for a nation in pursuit of a national identity. Indeed, the growing strength of European nationalism enhanced the desire of the Dutch to distinguish themselves from neighboring countries. Whereas cities in the new Germany, in Victorian England, and in the Second French Empire witnessed the emergence of monumental public buildings, due to lavish governmental support, in Holland such large-scale initiatives were absent. It is not impossible that the preference for a colorful, picturesque architecture instead was a deliberate attempt to convey a new individuality.

For the Jewish architect Rood, who was exposed to the debates over style through, among others, his membership of the learned society *Architectura et Amicitia*, applying Dutch Renaissance forms meant incorporating a clear ideological component. Whether the members of the synagogue, as well as the larger Jewish community, cared about its architectural meaning is another matter. The majority of Jews in the Pijp district, after all, were working-class and less aesthetically sensitive than the communal elite.

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in van der Woud, 119. She contends that the political, economic, and cultural developments taking place in Germany in the last quarter of the nineteenth century gave rise to suspicious and protective Dutch reactions, which were also discernable in the field of architecture.

They might have been just as pleased with an eclectic façade as with a Dutch Renaissance one, which communicated a different ideological message. Moreover, the concerns of the building committee were focused primarily on practical matters such as affordability. For them, a Dutch-Renaissance building was preferable because it proved to be the most economical choice due to its use of local building materials and to minimal ornamental requirements. They most likely hired Rood because he was a competent Jewish architect who was well-respected in the community and who understood the specific demands of a Jewish house of worship. That the final product harmonized with the overall street design and conformed to the prevailing neo-Renaissancism of its immediate surroundings – including neighboring residences and the diamond factory Flora – was therefore no surprise. Most of the structures built in the Pijp had emerged as part of the district's *revolutiebouw* [building revolution] of the 1870 and 1880s, which had applied the “old Dutch” style to produce inexpensive buildings in the shortest amount of time, for which the Dutch Renaissance proved most suitable.

While it is tempting to conclude that the members of Tesjoengat Israel deliberately elected a Dutch Renaissance design for their synagogue because it made a political or ideological statement about Jewish loyalty to the Dutch state or about their attraction to the Golden Age, it is more likely they preferred this particular style because it was the most sensible option among a variety of choices. In other words, the Gerard Dou synagogue, and Amsterdam synagogues in general, did not adhere to a deliberate aesthetic vocabulary. This does not mean that exterior appearances were not appreciated, but rather that architectural display was not a means to shape the national discourse on the Jews – as was the case, for instance, in Berlin. For the entire nineteenth century,

synagogue architecture in Amsterdam remained limited in scope and very much a local affair – quite the opposite direction taken by metropolitan Jews living elsewhere.

This might lead some readers to conclude that hevra synagogues in the Dutch capital were kept purposefully modest in an attempt not to be noticed. Such an interpretation, however, lacks substance. Contemporary sources do not reveal a desire on the part of Jewish congregations to become inconspicuous for fear of antisemitism. The public by and large was indifferent to Jewish affairs. There were cases, however, in which gentiles reacted quite favorably to new places of worship and actually shared in the inaugural celebrations. Curious Christians also attended synagogues during religious holidays, sometimes to the chagrin of Jewish worshipers as their presence only worsened already cramped conditions. Non-Jewish artists, too, expressed affection for the Jewish landscape, particularly for the “picturesque” old Jewish neighborhood in the city center. In an era of substantial socio-economic change and rapid urban expansion, the Jewish district – and the Jewish slums in particular – increasingly came to represent the “authentic” city, inspiring many artists to produce romanticized portraits of Jewish street life. Since this topic deserves a subchapter on its own, let us conclude our discussion of hevrot and turn to patterns of gentile receptivity in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### **Gentile Receptivity**

Inaugural celebrations of new synagogue buildings were never widely publicized events in Amsterdam. They temporarily drew the attention of people in the street, after which the routines of daily life resumed and the gaze of passersby shifted. The Jewish

press, too, devoted relatively little attention to new or rebuilt structures, not merely because the unofficial status of hevrot and their small size discouraged extensive publicity, but also because its primary concerns lay elsewhere. When it did elaborate on new buildings, such as the 1883 Beth Midrash, it concentrated primarily on the procession of religious ceremonies and formal speeches, with only an obligatory mention of its architectural value in the concluding sentence. To the non-Jewish press the addition of Jewish prayer houses in Amsterdam remained largely unnoticed. Although it occasionally reported on monumental synagogues abroad, it apparently found small, local shuls too inconsequential to include in the daily news. Inaugurations, then, remained highly local affairs, the celebrations of which were usually confined to the street blocks of which the buildings were part.

Since the majority of new synagogues emerged within the domain of the Jewish neighborhood, they encountered an audience that was entirely familiar with a pronounced Jewish presence. Indeed, there had been a permanent and conspicuous Jewish presence in the capital since the late sixteenth century and the majority of its Christian residents had come to consider Jews and the Jewish district an integral part of the city's fabric. Consequently, gentile neighbors and observers reacted rather unemotionally to signs of an increased Jewish visibility in their vicinity. If there were concerns over the Jews, then they generally addressed the increase in population density, particularly with regard to the unsanitary conditions of the old slums around the Uilenburgerstraat area, which many found unacceptable. New synagogues or new façades, in other words, did not add a particularly new dimension to a neighborhood that already was identified as Jewish, and gentiles were neither surprised nor shocked to witness the emergence of an additional

house of worship. The *Jewish Weekly* at one point did remark that non-Jews in the city of Zutphen had joined in an inaugural celebration by mounting Dutch flags on the sides of their homes: “A number of three-colored flags were waving on top of the synagogue’s roof, as well as on the sides of homes owned by non-Jews in the neighborhood, who had put them up to express their interest in the event.”<sup>132</sup> The fact that the *Jewish Weekly* did not elaborate on this occurrence might suggest that gentile participation was not unusual or unique. Descriptions of inaugurations in Amsterdam, however, excluded any mentioning of active gentile involvement, although we do know curious passersby paused to observe the proceedings.

Church bodies, especially the Dutch Reformed, predictably responded more reservedly. Having received an invitation from the Sephardic community to join in the bicentennial of the Esnoga (1675), a Dutch Reformed official by the name of J. P. Stricker impolitely declined by stating: “The church council of the local Dutch Reformed community is honored to inform you that it is sincerely appreciative of the invitation, but cannot possibly participate in a celebration which, in light of our doctrine, should be considered a cause for grief rather than merriment.”<sup>133</sup> This response caused offence not merely among Jews, who replied that “a lot still has to happen here before religious prejudices and intolerance are completely eradicated,” but among more liberal preachers of the Dutch Reformed church as well. The latter, according the *NRC Handelsblad*, openly expressed their disagreement by “encouraging their members to share in Israel’s joy.”<sup>134</sup> While openly antisemitic reactions were rare in the media, the authors of whom were in most cases immediately rebuked by fellow-Christians, conservative voices such

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<sup>132</sup> “Inwijding der nieuwe synagoge te Zutphen,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 25: 10 (5 September, 1879): 3.

<sup>133</sup> *NIW* 11: 4 (13 August, 1875): 3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

as Stricker's suggest formal relations between Christians and Jews continued to be reserved.

This persistent distance, however, did not prevent gentiles – most likely tourists – from visiting synagogues, especially during the High Holidays when curiosity about Jewish rituals attracted many observers to the Esnoga or the Great Synagogue. Moreover, it intensified Jewish sensitivities toward decorum, generating concern over the impression an Orthodox service would leave on Christian onlookers. “On Yom Kippur,” wrote “S. F. O.” in the late 1860s, “when we encounter so many [Jews] who, alas, we don't see in the synagogue for the entire year . . . what then does it look like? I don't want to say it out loud, you know what I mean. What a spectacle for the Christian visitor – and there are many on this day – when he enters our building. Does it appear to be a Day of Atonement? Is it not really a *hillul ha-Shem*?”<sup>135</sup> A fellow resident agreed: “What impression will non-Jews receive, many of whom visit our wonderful synagogue, when they see congregants throw off their *tallit* as quickly as possible to enjoy the fresh air, so they don't have to listen to a lecture and to God's word in a healthy [i.e. Dutch] language? These escapees are such a disgrace!”<sup>136</sup> Worshipers leaving the synagogue early, as well as noisy and disorderly conduct, were the very opposite of nineteenth

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<sup>135</sup> S. F. O., in “Ingezonden Stukken,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 13: 10 (20 September, 1867): 3. The author deems the “misconduct” of the Jews during Yom Kippur not merely an embarrassment toward gentiles; it is a desecration of the name of God.

<sup>136</sup> *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 16: 12 (30 September, 1870): 3. It is not entirely clear who these gentile observers were – in all probability they were tourists from abroad or from the provinces. Their reasons for attending services were most likely not dissimilar from those which spurred on sixteenth- and seventeenth century visitors, i.e. a genuine curiosity of the Other, of his religious customs and rituals, most of which remained foreign even to nineteenth-century gentiles. This led to “numerous crowds of spectators” that gathered in and around the synagogue, “gaping in curiosity as if we were monkeys” (*Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 13: 10 (20 September, 1867): 3). The slow pace at which community officials implemented reforms in religious services only contributed to concerns over public opinion, and it is plausible the latter constituted a contributing factor to the Jewish elites' alienation from synagogue services and their preference for congregating at café-chantants during the High Holidays.

century *beschaafdheid*, or respectability, and therefore considered an embarrassment to the public.

But while Jewish readers regularly wrote to newspapers expressing their concern over the lack of etiquette and the negative influence this would have on public opinion, Dutch gentiles were generally not too interested in Jewish affairs. Indeed, compared to neighboring Germany, where the Jews occupied a central position in the national debates over *Deutschtum*, the Dutch public appeared almost oblivious to their Jewish fellow citizens. This indifference can be explained in part by the fact that Jews were not perceived as posing a “threat” to the established order as the vast majority remained working or lower-middle class for much of the nineteenth century. They were not perceived as the bearers of a dangerous modernism that jeopardized Dutch traditions. Rather, the persistence of economic adversity and the arduous process of improving conditions prevented feelings of unease about Jewish advancement into previously Christian domains to take hold. Whereas in Germany the *embourgeoisement* of the Jewish population and its successful entry into professional circles triggered deep-seated anxieties and resentments, turning Jews into the “scapegoats for the crises of modern society,”<sup>137</sup> this development remained absent from the Dutch scene. Jews did not represent nineteenth-century capitalism, modern culture, and liberalism *par excellence* because their contribution was relatively minor; one might even say Jews – because of their largely Orthodox and working-class status – embodied the very opposite. Consequently, contends the Dutch historian Renate Fuks-Mansfeld, “most gentiles, for a long time far from well disposed towards the Jews, thus did not look upon them as social

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<sup>137</sup> Reinhard Rürup, “A Success Story and Its Limits: European Jewish Social History in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Jewish Social Studies* 11: 1 (Fall 2004): 3-15.



upstarts or over-ambitious chasers after high posts and honors, but as poor devils unable to shake off the shackles of the ghetto. An aloof, often mocking condescension was the most common attitude towards Jews, still stumbling on the road to social respectability.”<sup>138</sup> Into the 1870s, then, Jews were mostly perceived as poor souls who deserved to be pitied rather than begrudged. This attitude would change in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, mostly due to strong Jewish ties to Dutch socialism and unionization, but even then Jews failed to become a target for close scrutiny solely for “being Jews.”

Gentile condescension found its way into social stereotypes. Jews were said to be noisy, especially in situations when respectable silence was called for. One local Christian advised his out-of-town friend not to sit next to Jews during the annual summer concerts because of their “incessant babbling,” assuring him “they are a nuisance both in Artis and in the Park.”<sup>139</sup> Prejudices found their way in Dutch sayings too; rowdy situations often received the response “it’s as noisy here as a Jewish synagogue!” Stereotypes such as these were unpleasant and offensive, but generally innocent, as were contemporary biases and caricatures of Catholics and Liberals. Dutch Jews, after all, were very much aware that Holland was not such a bad place to live, especially during a time when nationalism and racial antisemitism gained strength in societies across Europe. “Among the peoples of the world the Dutch are a good people,” wrote one anonymous author in the *NIW* in 1870. “The Jews haven’t had it any better anywhere else than here . . . This does not prevent me from wishing things were different sometimes; many a Christian still looks down upon ‘those Jews,’ who continue to be seen as ‘somehow

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<sup>138</sup> Renate Fuks-Mansfeld, “Arduous Adaptation, 1814-1870,” *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, 226.

<sup>139</sup> *Amsterdam en de Amsterdammers, door een Amsterdammer*, 14.

different.”<sup>140</sup> Overall, the Jews, their synagogues, and their neighborhood were at times the target of mockery, but they were accepted and familiar components of Dutch culture and therefore not terribly exciting objects for gentile scrutiny.

There was one exception. We do see a growing interest in the Jews in artistic circles, particularly among painters. Petrus Gerardus Vertin’s *Winterdag in de Jodenbuurt* (A Winter’s Day in the Jewish Neighborhood, 1877), Charles Lapante’s *In de Jodenbuurt* (In the Jewish Neighborhood, 1879), Reinier Craeyvanger’s *St. Antoniebreestraat* (1860), Johannes Hilverdink’s *Jodenbreestraat* (Jodenbree Street or Wide Jewish Street, c. 1860), Eduard Alexander Hilverdink’s *Huis van Rembrandt in de Jodenbreestraat* (Rembrandt’s House in the Jodenbreestreet, 1867), and the works of J. D. G. Grootveld and Simon van Wezen, to name a few, all tried to capture the prevailing atmosphere of the hustle and bustle in the city’s most densely populated streets. These recreations were oftentimes highly romanticized depictions of everyday life, with gentle yellow and brown tints to soften the harsh realities of dire poverty. The work of Eduard Alexander Hilverdink (1846-1891) expressed this very well; the glow of sunlight lights up the buildings in the Jodenbree Street, drying the laundry hanging from the small balconies. In the background we see the chimney of a factory bellowing fumes, while the foreground displays an industrious crowd of workers, whose faces remain largely expressionless, passing picturesque street lanterns (see fig. 15). One peddler is trying to sell his wares to a small group of women, who are gathered around his small wooden table. It is an image simultaneously bright and gloomy, conveying an awareness of ongoing hardship while also cherishing this hardship by wrapping the moment in melancholy and nostalgia.

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<sup>140</sup> *NIW* 6: 21 (16 December, 1870): 2.

It is no coincidence that this genre appeared at a time when Amsterdam entered a phase of intense modernization and urban expansion. In an era that produced static and monotone living environments outside of the Singelgracht, constructed cheaply by private investors and sharp speculators, the old city center gained a new appreciation. The old Jewish neighborhood in particular, untouched by redevelopment efforts and therefore uncorrupted by modernity, became the epitome of authentic city life. “When one again observes these old and beautiful buildings, and sees the bustling activity,” wrote one city-dweller in the *Amsterdam Weekly*, “one wishes sometimes: oh, if only times were still like this!”<sup>141</sup> These outbursts of nostalgia for the architecture and painting of the Golden Age, an era during which life was believed to be less complex and more “honest,” were quite common. The poor Jewish street peddler who lived in these “primitive” conditions represented a simple way of life that was rapidly vanishing. The Catholic school teacher Antonius Franciscus Franse, for instance, exudes such sentimentalism in a long poem entitled “The Amsterdam Jewish Neighborhood,” published around the mid-1860s:

If you ever desire to go to Amsterdam,  
You should not pass over its Jewish neighborhood.  
Whether you set foot in the Uilenburg or Vlooienburg,  
In the [Joden]bree Street or in Marken . . .  
Then Abraham’s progeny will convince you,  
How people in Amsterdam understand true folk life.

While Franse did not refrain from including negative stereotypes – warning visitors to keep a close eye on their watches and wallets – he described in great detail the activities, smells, and sounds of the streets, which he must have found a fascinating sight. For Franse as well as for Hilverdink, the Jewish neighborhood had true “character,” the same

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<sup>141</sup> “Amsterdam in de Zeventiende Eeuw,” *Weekblad Amsterdam* (18 July, 1897). GAA: *Hartkamp Collection* 1, pp. 91-93.

type of authenticity that leading architects of the day were striving to recreate in their new designs.

However, neither synagogues nor religious Jews on their way to the synagogue were the foci of attention for these artists. Perhaps religious themes were considered less appealing in an increasingly secular society. Perhaps the widespread attention paid to Amsterdam synagogues in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when their unprecedented authority on the urban scene produced a respectable collection of engravings and paintings, dissuaded artists from redirecting their gaze on religious buildings. And, perhaps, in the case of hevroet, gentile painters were unaware of their existence. Even after small synagogues had occupied a permanent location for decades residents were sometimes oblivious to their presence. Anousjka Vermeulen, a Christian woman who lived next door to the Gerard Dou synagogue in the early 1900s, confessed: “At first we lived somewhat further up the Gerard Dou Street, where we had never heard of a synagogue. We only found out there was one when we moved nearby, because that’s when one saw odd individuals wearing high hats walk into the street every Saturday morning.”<sup>142</sup> To the Dutch artist, as well as to a large part of the Jewish community itself, the synagogue had lost much of its previous magnetism.

## **Conclusion**

Amsterdam Jewry in the second half of the nineteenth century was not in need of an architecture of emancipation. Having received full political and legal rights in 1796, most Jews felt confident that their status as Dutch citizens was protected by the state. “Our political status is no different than that of other Dutchmen,” wrote one observer in

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<sup>142</sup> Vermeulen is quoted by M. Kielich in the *NRC Handelsblad* (28 February, 1998).

the *Jewish Weekly*. “[We] should make no distinction between being a Netherlander and a Jew, but should instead acknowledge . . . that the Jew here has become a Dutchman in every respect, by law, in equality, in freedom, in humanity, and in brotherhood. The Dutch Jew is above all else a Jewish Dutchman.”<sup>143</sup> While social emancipation remained a challenge and while negative stereotypes remained common, Dutch Jewish officials did not consider it necessary to make a bold architectural statement about the place and participation of the Jews in Dutch society by means of a monumental synagogue. Even if they had, the community lacked the funds to build on a scale similar to that in Berlin, London, Paris, and various other European capitals. Rapidly increasing land prices, the high costs of maintaining existing community properties, the unusually large number of Jewish poor, and the small bourgeois elite rendered the building of a new synagogue a topic for future consideration.

Besides, in Amsterdam the process of making public statements through majestic architectural edifices had already taken place in the late seventeenth century. As the previous chapter has shown, it was in the 1670s that both Sephardim and Ashkenazim initiated building plans on a scale never before seen in Europe, publicly communicating to a Christian audience the Jews’ prosperity and aesthetic sensibility. In a time when resources were largely allocated for providing health and educational services to the poor, and when secularism among Jews was on the rise, re-investing in this message seemed gratuitous. Consequently few synagogues were built, and the ones that did appear tended to be relatively small and inconspicuous in Amsterdam’s urban landscape.

However, while conspicuous community synagogues remained absent, the proliferation of private hevrot does relay a visual narrative that is worth exploring. The

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<sup>143</sup> “Onze politieke toestand,” *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 12: 14 (19 October, 1866): 1.

latter communicated the Jews' negotiation of identity in an era during which identities became increasingly compartmentalized. Hevra members approved the public expression of popular tastes, adopting both neo-Renaissance and highly eclectic façades for their buildings, while privately they continued to adhere strongly to Jewish traditions and requirements. Existing community synagogues, too, did not renovate their floor plans or spatial lay-outs during reconstructions in order to accommodate reforms. In many ways, Amsterdam synagogues were portraits of the Jews' socio-economic profile and ideological outlook: they reflected the mediation between public acculturation and private particularism, between the remarkable adaptation to their Dutch surroundings and an abiding separateness. Many Jews, for instance, had internalized Dutch modes of behavior, but many continued to socialize primarily with other Jews in the privacy of their homes. Many frequented coffee houses, smoked cigars and worked on Saturdays, but adhered to Jewish traditions nonetheless – more than 90 percent followed Jewish rites with regard to circumcision, marriage, and burial well into the 1930s. And Jews, although in comparatively small numbers, entered professional circles, the majority of its bourgeois elite continued to live in the immediate vicinity of the old Jewish neighborhood.

This does not mean that Jewish Orthodoxy or Jewish private spheres were immune to change. The 1892 “Report of the State of Affairs of the Main Synagogue,” for instance, reported that “all the measures taken in the last few years to improve decorum during religious services continue to meet their objectives.”<sup>144</sup> The three-cornered hat worn by synagogue officials was replaced by a beret, the Great Synagogue introduced

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<sup>144</sup> “Verslag van den toestand der hoofdsynagoge,” *Centraal Blad voor Israëlieten* 7: 51 (1 April, 1892): 5.

choral singing during Shabbat, the reciting of *mi she'berach* were abolished<sup>145</sup>, and services were increasingly held in Dutch. However, the fact that the majority of complaints sent to the press denounced the persistent traditionalism of the rabbis and the enduring “misconduct” of Jewish worshipers, that growing numbers resorted to temporary and “immoral” café-chantants for religious services, and that reforms were largely cosmetic in nature rather than ideological, suggests that Amsterdam synagogues remained surprisingly resistant to modernizing influences until very late into the nineteenth century. Consequently, contrary to London and Berlin, the Dutch capital did not witness the subtle but nonetheless imperative transformation of the conception of a synagogue as a house of prayer to an *Erbauungsort*, a locality where worshipers could gain and display edification by means of a modernized liturgy, edificatory sermon, and an inspiring Christian-based interior design. Synagogue spaces, in other words, remained predominantly religious spaces, unwelcoming to secular stimuli and therefore unsuitable sites for the display of bourgeois respectability.

It is safe to say that Amsterdam Jewry followed quite a different path to modernization than did Jews elsewhere. Indeed, with respect to synagogue building they traversed the very opposite direction. Having experienced its architectural apex in the seventeenth century, a lack of finances, political will, and an increasingly secular population brought this early advancement in synagogue building to a screeching halt. At a time when the major urban centers of Europe witnessed new urban landmarks,

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<sup>145</sup>*Mi She'berach*, literally “the One who blessed,” are traditional Jewish prayers dedicated to people in ill health. Their recital, during which God is asked to bring about a complete healing for the person for whom the blessing is said, became customary in synagogue services around the middle ages. Since these prayers required a financial contribution, significantly increasing the annual revenues of Jewish communities, congregations encouraged their integration into the service. During the nineteenth century, however, the recital of *mi she'berach* was limited or abolished, not merely to shorten the duration of the service, but also because it was no longer considered appropriate to publicly include money-offerings in a religious service.

announcing the Jews' political, cultural, and ideological aspirations, Amsterdam remained mainly an observer and reverted back to small hevra synagogues and constructional maintenance, and shifted its attention to more pressing needs. Indeed, it would take until the late 1920s before two new communal synagogues were built, both of which again featured contemporary, in vogue exteriors and traditional, Orthodox interiors.



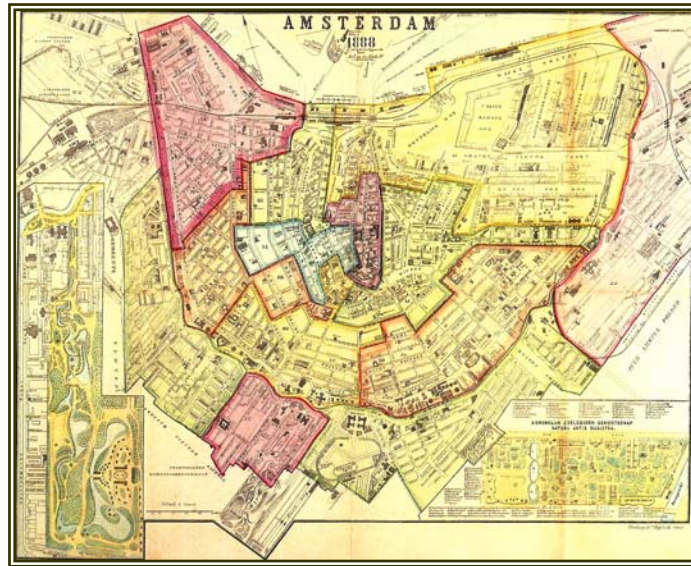


Fig. 15: Map of Amsterdam, 1888

Source: Marc Hameleers, *Kaarten van Amsterdam 1866-2000. Publicatie van het gemeentearchief Amsterdam, uitgegeven door de stichting H. J. Duyvisfonds nr. 27* (Bussum: Uitgeverij THOTH, 2002)



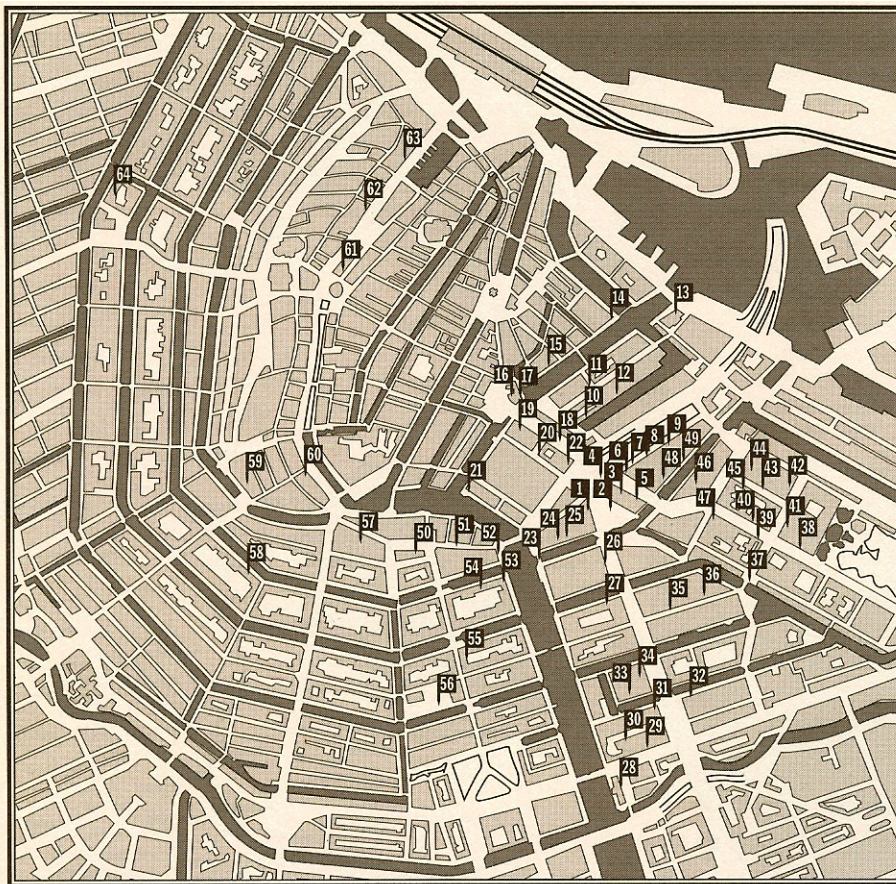
Fig. 16: “The Jew With Lottery Tickets”

Source: Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam



Fig. 17: Slums in Uilenburg

Source: Arnold van der Valk, "Amsterdam in aanleg: Planvorming en dagelijks handelen 1850-1900" (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Amsterdam, 14 April 1989), 69.



**The old Jewish quarter**

- 1 Jewish Historical Museum
- 2 Jonas Daniel Meijerplein with *Dockworker* statue
- 3 Portuguese Synagogue
- 4 Mr. Visserplein
- 5 De Castro pharmacy
- 6 Dutch Israelite Seminary
- 7 Rapenburg Shul
- 8 former girls' orphanage
- 9 Beth Hamidrash Ets Haim
- 10 Boas diamond-cutting works
- 11 Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat
- 12 Uilenburger Shul
- 13 West India Company warehouses
- 14 Montelbaans Tower
- 15 offices of the Jewish Council Displaced Persons' Aid Bureau
- 16 De Pinto house
- 17 St Antoniessluis
- 18 Jodenbreestraat
- 19 Rembrandt's house
- 20 Waterlooplein
- 21 Jewish Resistance Monument
- 22 Mozes en Aaronkerk

**The Jewish canal streets and the Plantage**

- 23 Walter Süsskind bridge
- 24 Portuguese Israelite old-age home for men
- 25 Suasso house
- 26 Jewish Appreciation Memorial
- 27 Jewish Council head offices
- 28 Amstel hotel
- 29 Lippmann Rosenthal
- 30 former Maimonides Jewish Lyceum
- 31 Diamond Bourse
- 32 Jewish Invalid Hospital
- 33 Gassan
- 34 Lepelstraat
- 35 Nieuwe Kerkstraat
- 36 Russian Shul
- 37 Lau Mazirel bridge
- 38 Plantage-Middenlaan
- 39 Hollandsche Schouwburg (Dutch Theatre)
- 40 the crèche
- 41 Registrar of Births, Marriages, and Deaths

- 42 Plancius
- 43 Henri Polaklaan
- 44 Diamond Workers' Union
- 45 Portuguese Israelite Hospital
- 46 A. C. Wertheim park
- 47 Beth Yisrael
- 48 De Oude Populier (The Old Poplar)
- 49 Cohen house

**The city centre**

- 50 Rembrandtplein
- 51 Amstelstraat
- 52 Amstel Diamonds
- 53 Sarphati house
- 54 Belmonte Court
- 55 Mouwe's kosher delicatessen
- 56 Kokadorus
- 57 Tuschinski
- 58 Goudstikker's art supplies
- 59 Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana
- 60 Maison de Bonneterie
- 61 De Bijenkorf department store
- 62 Allert de Lange
- 63 Lloyd offices
- 64 Anne Frank house

Fig. 18: Map Jewish Amsterdam

Source: J. C. H. Blom, R. G. Fuks-Mansfeld, and I. Schöffer (eds.), *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002).



Fig. 19: Synagogue for employees of the diamond factory Boas, Uilenburgerstraat 173  
 Source: Gemeentearchief Amsterdam, Publieke Werken #5221-1891

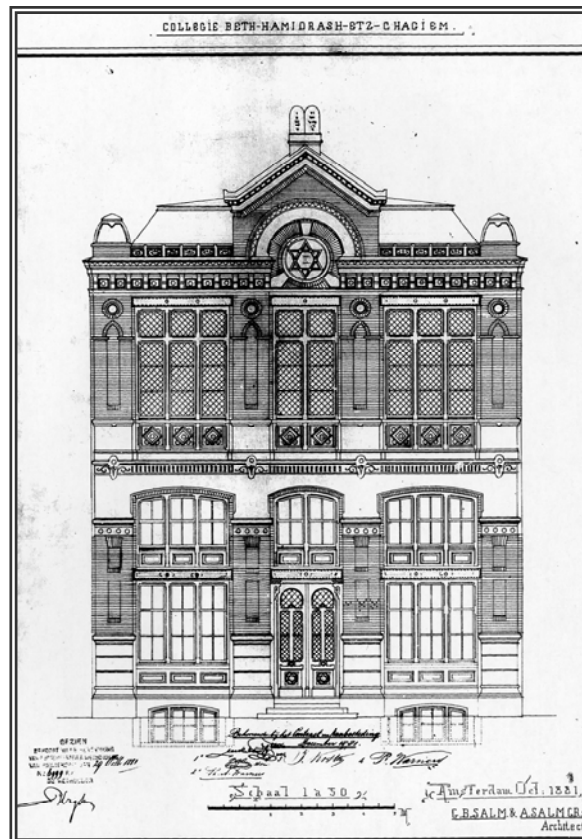


Fig. 20: “Collegie Beth HaMidrash Etz Chajim”  
 Source: Gemeentearchief Amsterdam

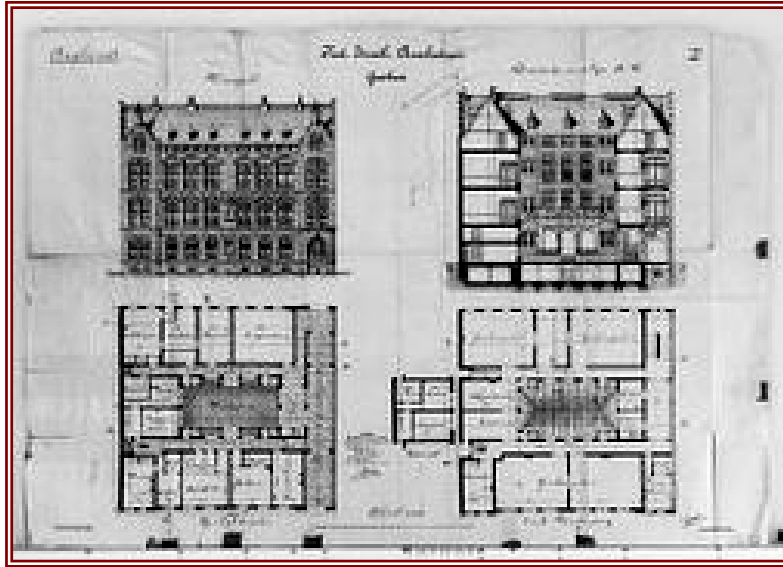


Fig. 21: Nederlands Israëlitisch Armbestuur  
 Source: Gemeentearchief Amsterdam: Bouw- en Woningtoezicht; Bouwtekeningen #5221BT913492

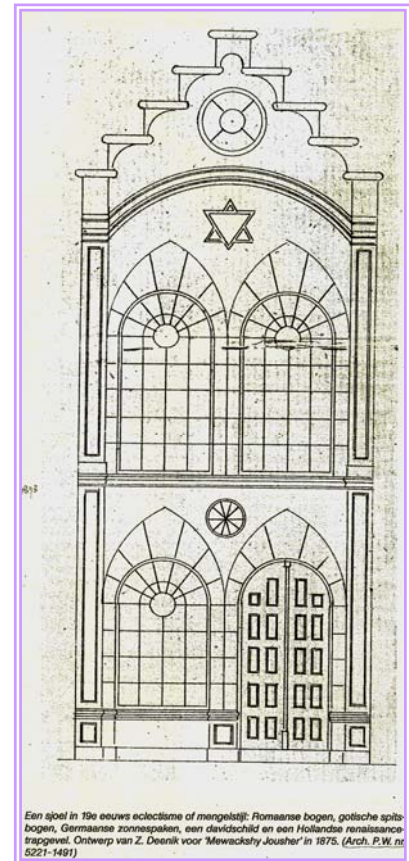
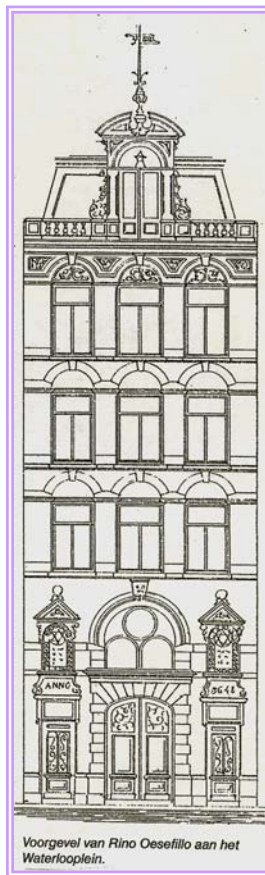
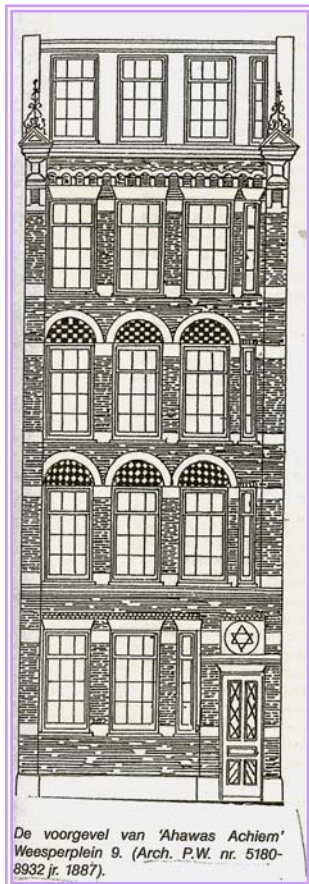


Fig. 22: Hevra synagogues  
 Source: C. Reijnders, "Op zoek naar oude chevre-sjoeltjes in Amsterdam," *Hakehilla* 33-34 (1987-1988)

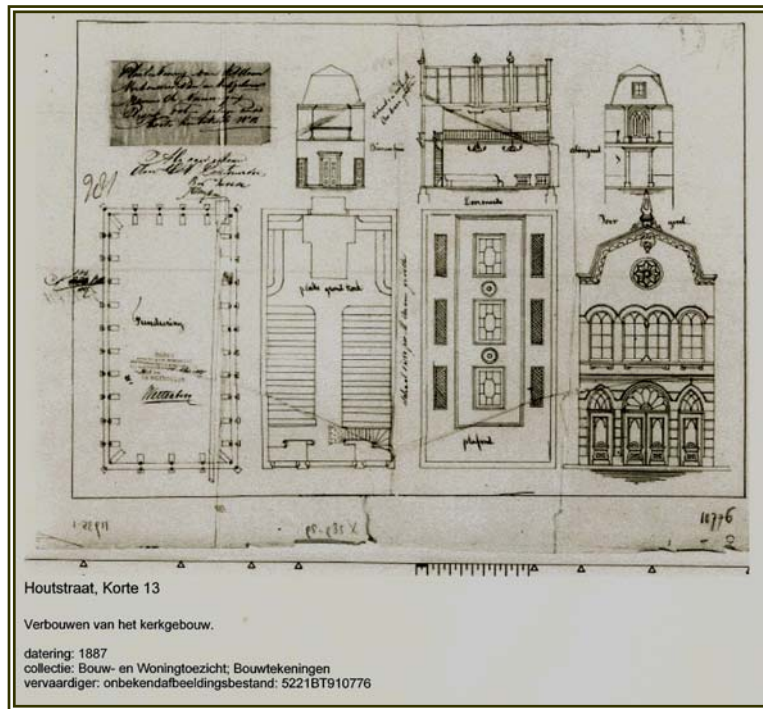


Fig. 23: Blueprint Rechit Tov (1855)  
 Source: Gemeentearchief Amsterdam: Bouw- en Woningtoezicht; Bouwtekeningen #5221BT910776

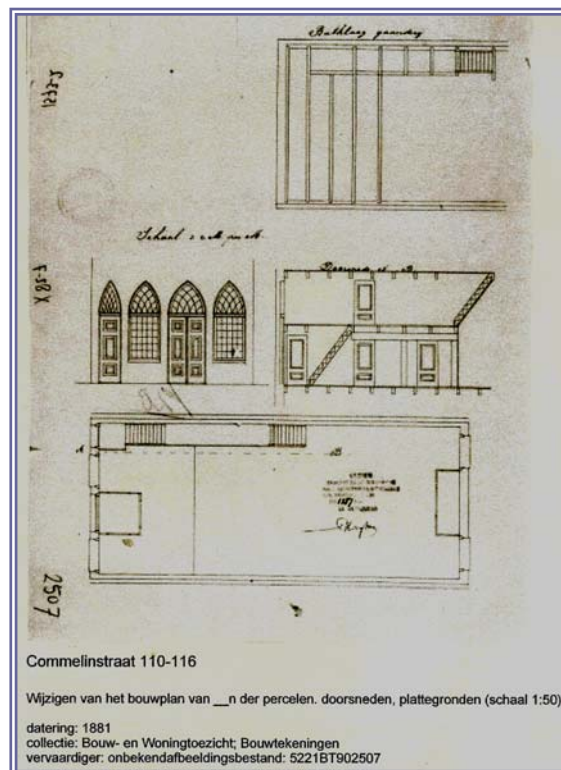


Fig. 24: Blueprint Beth Jacob, Commelinstraat 110-116 (1881)  
 Source: Gemeentearchief Amsterdam: Bouw- en Woningtoezicht; Bouwtekeningen #5221BT902507



Fig. 25: Gerard Dou Square

Source: Gemeentearchief Amsterdam: Prentbriefkaart verzameling 2, wijk 28, neg. D 29659 – Top 1182-32



Fig. 26: The Gerard Doustreet Synagogue  
Source: personal collection

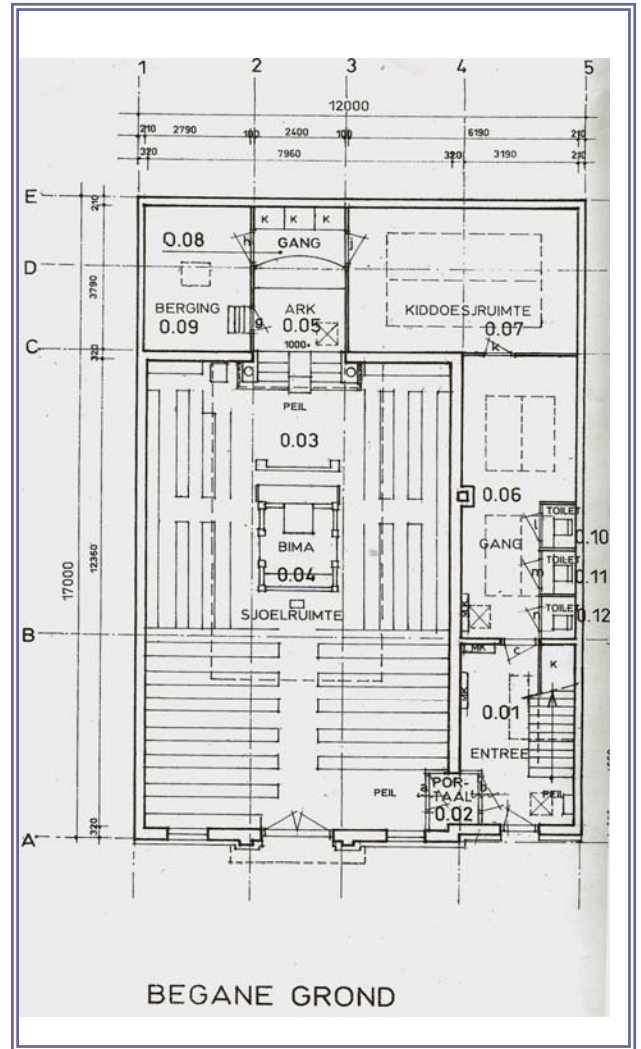
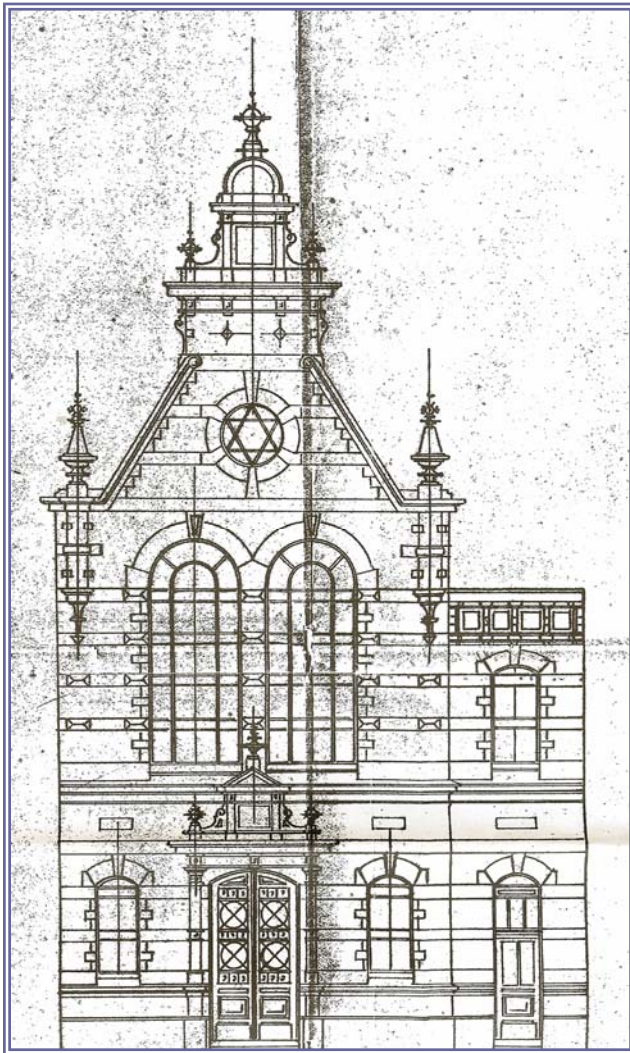


Fig. 27: Gerard Dou Synagogue Blueprint Designs by Emanuel M. Rood – 1891  
 Source: personal collection





Fig. 28: Interior Gerard Dou Synagogue  
Source: personal collection



Fig. 29: Johannes Hilverdink (1846-1891), "De Jodenbuurt te Amsterdam" (1889)  
Source: Amsterdam Historical Museum

## Chapter IV

### “There Should Be Sermons in Stone” Synagogue Building in High Victorian London

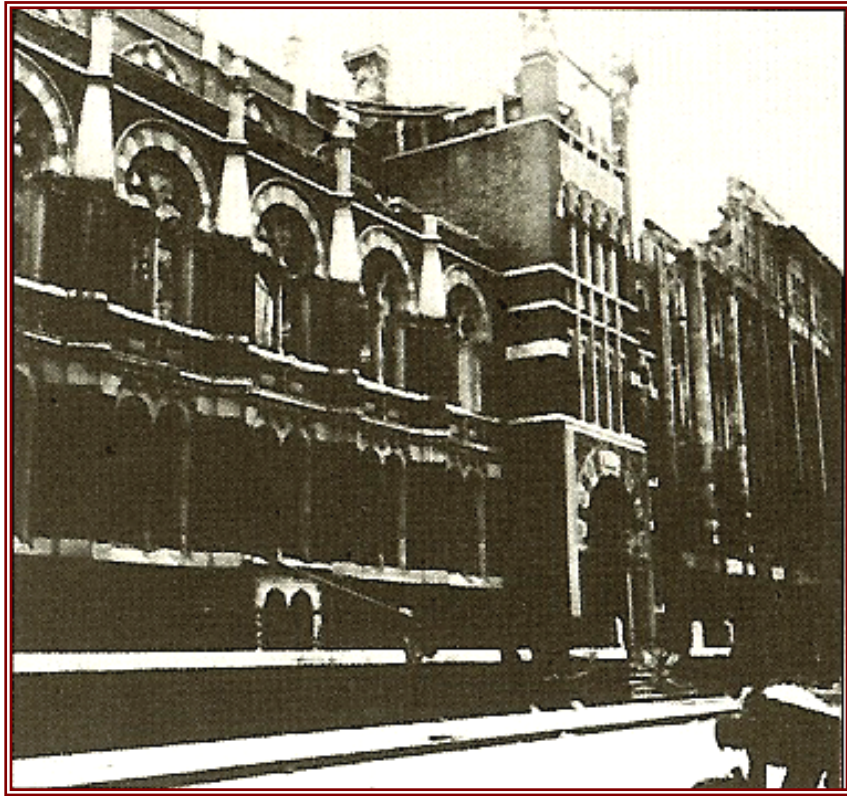


Fig. 30: Central Synagogue, 1870

“Every structure, like every picture – if the artist knows his art – should tell its own story. There should be ‘sermons in stones.’ This Synagogue, it seems to us, does tell its own story. It carries its meaning with it. As the work rises before our eyes, we cannot fail to admire the beauty of its proportions, the grace of its design, its precise consistency with its object – the simple yet majestic worship of a people, proud of their Faith, but humble in their aspirations.”

~*The Jewish Chronicle*, 1869.

“The belief and manners of all people are embodied in the edifices they raise.”

~ A. W. N. Pugin, *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England*, 1834.

In the summer of 1868, the *Jewish Chronicle*, the most widely-read Jewish newspaper in Great Britain, featured an article on music and singing in the synagogue. In this article the author, who referred to himself as “H.,” made a passionate appeal for a more decorous religious service, one in which Jewish worshippers would adopt the Christian ritual of a boys’ choir, the “silvery voices” of whom would uplift the prayers of the Jewish faith and render the service more in tune with contemporary cultural codes.<sup>1</sup> Although wary of promoting an organ – “Human voices *worship*,” he maintained, “manufactured instruments do *not*” – H. advocated the introduction of a well-trained choir to make the service “suitable for its sublime, its supreme purpose, adapted to the hearts of its attendants.” Appeals like these were not uncommon in Victorian London. In an era when socio-economic and demographic changes altered the profile of the urban Jew, inviting a higher level of acculturation to British norms and behaviors, it was only to be expected that established religious practices should come under scrutiny. Jewish periodicals thus regularly published letters complaining of the lack of decorum and offering either modest or drastic solutions to the “problem.” What distinguished H.’s letter, however, is not so much its position on synagogue choirs, but rather its suggestion that this issue was part of a larger, contentious question regarding the kind of synagogue experience that an urban Jewish community in transition would desire. There are indeed, he writes:

various and varied views in regard to the arrangements and services of the synagogue. Some persons, for instance, are of the opinion that synagogues should be numerous, spacious, and conveniently located; others (whose ideas for some time appeared to prevail) seem to think that they should be few, small, and in unattainable positions. Some desire that every appliance should be provided to render a synagogue appropriate as an agreeable morning lounge or as a satisfactory

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<sup>1</sup> H., “Synagogue Singing,” *The Jewish Chronicle* no. 703 (June 5, 1868): 4-5. Subsequent quotations are from this edition. *The Jewish Chronicle*, which first appeared in 1841, will from hereon forward be referred to as *JC*. For an insightful study of the *JC* see David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

substitute for a concert room; others, adopting the extreme contrary, are content that it should be so disposed and contrived that its congregants cannot move in their seats or depart from the building without subjecting themselves or their fellow worshippers to the risks of acute physical pain. Some desire the synagogue to be gorgeous in purple and gold, or fantastic with pilasters and arabesques – like a court of the Crystal Palace; while others prefer that it shall be prominently, peculiarly, and even pretentiously ugly. In like manner, some are anxious that its service should be exquisitely attractive to the senses, with the concerted charms, elegant taste, and polite precision of a May Fair *matinée musicale*; while others are complacently gratified with a chaotic whirl of noises which would be monotonous if they were not desperately discordant, and which would be ludicrous if they were not sobered down by the solemnity of their surroundings and the sacredness of their intentions.

In an apparently amused tone, H. elaborates on the conflicting views of what a nineteenth-century synagogue should look like, what its function should be, where it should be located, and what its service should accomplish. By doing so he touched on the very issue that prompted the *Jewish Chronicle* to publish a series of articles on the “The Synagogue Question” in the early 1870s,<sup>2</sup> and that motivated the establishment of the United Synagogue and the Federation of Minor Synagogues in 1870 and 1887 respectively. In an era of profound transformation – *embourgeoisement*, suburbanization, institutional centralization and immigration – the synagogue and the “synagogue question” became a central medium through which concerns over Jewish acculturation, identity, and self-representation were expressed.

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the United Synagogue (US), an association whose policies aimed to unify and centralize Anglo-Jewry into a well-organized, acculturated minority, played a dominant role in synagogue building.<sup>3</sup> Conscious of the fact that the City synagogues were losing members due to the migration

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<sup>2</sup> A series of articles appeared on this topic between 1872 and 1874. See “The Synagogue Question,” *JC*, no. 152 (February 23, 1872): 8-10; no. 156 (March 22, 1872): 8-10; no. 157 (March 29, 1872): 6-7; no. 158 (April 5, 1872): 8-9; no. 159 (April 12, 1872): 24-25; no. 161 (April 26, 1872): 54-55; no. 165 (May 24, 1872): 112-113; no. 167 (June 7, 1872): 142-144; no. 271 (June 5, 1874): 152-153.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed study of the United Synagogue policies, see Aubrey Newman, *The United Synagogue, 1870-1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) and Judy Glasman, “London Synagogues and the Jewish Community, c. 1870-1900,” Thesis, Bartlett School of Architecture (London: London University, 1982).

of middle-class Jews to better neighborhoods,<sup>4</sup> Jewish leaders founded the US with the primary objective of “maintaining, erecting, founding, and carrying on, in London and its neighbourhood, places of worship for persons of the Jewish religion who conform to the Polish or German Ritual.”<sup>5</sup> By joining together the major Ashkenazic synagogues by an Act of Parliament, the US centralized its resources and from that time onward helped provide London Jewry with dignified prayer houses wherever they were needed. Its establishment, however, also meant that Jewish leaders acquired a substantial level of control over what kind of building was deemed appropriate, where it would be located, and by whom it would be designed.

We should note, however, that there were boundaries to the power of the US. The organizational basis of religious life in Britain was voluntary and institutions such as the US and the chief rabbinate had authority only to the extent that the wider Anglo-Jewish population was willing to accept their claims to primacy. London, in other words, did not have a *Gemeinde*. As opposed to Imperial Germany, where membership in the Jewish community was mandatory and a matter of civil status, in Britain it was a means of self-identification. This meant that the US enforced policies and regulations with regard to synagogue building and religious observance, but that congregations had the liberty to build synagogues independently if they so desired. While most observant Jews in the Victorian period expressed a positive attitude towards institutional centralization and communal authority – it was, after all, a sign of respectability in bourgeois English

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<sup>4</sup> The *JC* stated that “the whole aspect of the subject [the synagogue question] has recently changed. Local circumstances have affected it, as well as the alterations in the general position of the community. Men have been too apt to regard the matter in a local or restricted view . . . the time is arriving at which the questions should be looked at boldly.” See “The Synagogue Question,” *JC*, no. 152 (Feb. 23, 1872): 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> London Metropolitan Archives (LMA): United Synagogue Records ACC/2712/14/3d: “Bye-Laws.” The five original constituent synagogues were the Great, New, Hambro, Central, and Bayswater synagogues. By 1903 the US consisted of fifteen constituent synagogues, eight of which it had partially funded. A more elaborate description of its policies will follow below.

society – there were many occasions, as we shall see, where different opinions on the style, size, and interior design of synagogues led to heated debates and public quarrels.<sup>6</sup>

From its early conception, the US introduced a standardized synagogue model, i.e., a moderate to large-sized brick building, the exterior of which conformed to contemporary aesthetic norms by remaining tastefully reserved, and the interior of which remained faithful to strict Orthodox traditions, while featuring elaborate decorative motifs. As a result, elegant buildings appeared in a variety of London districts: in Stepney Green in the north-east, in Bayswater and the West End in the west, in Dalston and St. John's Wood in the north (figs. 1-4). Whereas continental capitals such as Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Stockholm witnessed the construction of Jewish landmarks in the second half of the nineteenth century, London saw instead the accumulation of multiple prayer houses distributed all over the city.

The rationale for the standardized synagogue model grew in part from the demographic realities of the day. London Jewry had ceased to be concentrated in one district and had begun to fan out, especially northward and westward. “The immense growth of the metropolis,” stated the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1872, “the distribution of our community over its various quarters, [and] the propriety of encouraging such distribution or dispersions, are all arguments in favour of district – rather than large central – places of worship.”<sup>7</sup> Building a monumental synagogue that was inconveniently located for

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<sup>6</sup> For more on intracommunal tensions and discord, see Meir Persoff, *Faith Against Reason: Religious Reform and the British Chief Rabbinate, 1840-1990* (forthcoming); Eugene C. Black, “The Anglicization of Orthodoxy: The Adlers, Father and Son,” in *Profiles in Diversity: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870*, edited by Frances Malino and David Sorkin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 295-325.

<sup>7</sup> “The Synagogue Question,” *JC*, no. 271 (June 5, 1874): 152-53. The editors of the *JC* had made a similar statement a few years earlier: “We neither desire nor do we want a structure eclipsing the temple of Solomon, such as erected within the last few years by the congregations of Berlin or Pesht; we rather want . . . a number of synagogues spread all over the metropolis, so that every coreligionist should be able to find one within walking distance.” See “The Synagogal Movement,” *JC*, no. 633 (February 1, 1867):4-5. This

large numbers of Jews was considered highly impractical and financially irresponsible. Numerous district synagogues, on the other hand, erected under the guidance of the US, served multiple purposes: they would prevent Jews from religious laxity and “Nothingarianism”<sup>8</sup>; they would increase communal revenue; they would promote residential integration; and they would set an example to Jews and gentiles alike that religious orthodoxy and Anglicization could exist in harmony.<sup>9</sup>

A further explanation for the architectural modesty of Victorian synagogues, however, lay in the representational realm. Communal leaders aspired to convey an image of religious respectability and avoided drawing undue attention by constructing synagogues that boldly publicized Jewish affluence and self-confidence. This does not mean that synagogues were purposefully designed to be inconspicuous – they were not – but that their unpretentiousness was considered a cultural virtue. A variety of different styles could be applied – the free-for-all aesthetic climate of the high Victorian period, after all, permitted the reviving and blending of multiple architectural traditions – but the overall exterior composition was to be discreet and to minimize distinctively Jewish features. Consequently, the Victorian cityscape featured Moorish, Byzantine,

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strategy of building numerous district synagogues prevented monumentality. It was financially unfeasible to support numerous large-scale building initiatives. Lionel Louis Cohen, one of the founders of the US, explained that “there is, financially speaking, a wide distinction between advances made for the purpose of erecting synagogues, and appropriations in redemption of annual existing charges on established synagogues . . . the principle of replacement of capital must be inflexibly maintained; otherwise at the rate of decadence of its funded property in progress . . . the United Synagogue will soon lose its power of aiding the religious movement of the community, and providing for its recurrent wants.” A multiplicity of synagogues thus required financial prudence. See Cohen in LMA: ACC/2712/01/001, “Executive Committee Minutes (July 13, 1876).

<sup>8</sup> “It is no secret,” wrote the *JC* of the Jewish population in North London, “that, in this neighbourhood, a tendency to what Jews call Unitarianism, but which is really Nothingarianism or Indifferentism, had set in; and this was successfully and happily checked by the establishment of this congregation.” See “The Synagogue Question,” *JC* 159 (April 12, 1872): 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> The fact that suburban synagogues and their congregations oftentimes remained Orthodox suggests that the pattern traced by American-Jewish sociologists – that of religious Orthodoxy confined to the city center and of increasing secularism in suburbia – does not necessarily pertain to London.

Romanesque, neo-Classical, and even Gothic-inspired synagogues that aimed to communicate to the public “the simple yet majestic worship of a people, proud of their Faith, but humble in their aspirations.” While it would be a simplification to maintain that London synagogues were British on the outside and Jewish on the inside, it can be argued that compared to urban Jewish communities on the continent, London Jewry’s public announcement of its presence remained rather subdued.

The implementation of these centralized building policies has given rise to the general lament among architectural historians that the synagogue landscape of Victorian London was uninspiring. Edward Jamilly, for instance, complained of “this half century of depressing synagogue architecture,” which bestowed on London “non-committal synagogue design that has little spiritual inspiration [and] dull buildings lacking a true understanding of tradition and development.”<sup>10</sup> Others, such as Rachel Wischnitzer and Brian de Breffny, distracted by the magnificent structures rising on the continent, largely passed over late-Victorian synagogues in their analyses, only mentioning in passing their efficient, practical nature. While this response is related to the displeasure with nineteenth-century eclecticism, the disorder of which annoyed many classically-trained scholars, it also grows out of the fact that London synagogues *were* aesthetically reserved and less noteworthy than those emerging elsewhere.

However, the challenge and the main objective of this chapter is to look beyond the quiet exterior of the buildings and to listen more closely to the conversations that surrounded their establishment. By doing so, the impression of central US control and consensus, of a Golden Age of synagogue building impressive in number and

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Jamilly, “Anglo-Jewish Architects and Architecture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 18 (1953-1958): 127-143.



organization, although less remarkable in its public presence or architectural innovativeness, becomes deceptive. Their interior and exterior manifestation, after all, shows the final product, not the debates that preceded it, which give us insights into contemporary Anglo-Jewish concerns.

Below the surface, for instance, we detect local resistance to the US, whose vision promoted architectural modesty, cultural conformity, and religious centralization. Acculturated Jews in the West End entered a long-drawn and passionate conflict over the Bayswater synagogue. In what was coined the “Battle over Bayswater,” members argued whether their increasingly cramped prayer quarters should be torn down and rebuilt into a large “cathedral synagogue,” or whether their existing building should be slightly expanded with the expectation of an additional district synagogue being constructed within the two-mile radius determined by the US. Immigrants, too, rebelled against centralization imposed by native Jews, not merely by founding their own hevrot – in some cases almost adjacent to synagogues of the established community – but also by purposefully ignoring the attempts made by Western elites to alter their religious practices. The much-publicized East End Scheme, which “proposed to build a monster synagogue”<sup>11</sup> in order to expedite the Anglicization of alien Jews and to eliminate “dirty” hevrot from the London scene, ultimately failed to gain support. The Federation of Synagogues, which shared a similar ideological outlook as the US but was critical of its methods, played an important role in the dissolution of the scheme. And lastly, local rebellion manifested itself among Jewish radical socialists in the late 1880s, when they organized a “Synagogue Parade” on Shabbat that took hundreds of Jews to the Great Synagogue to protest against the existing social order, against religion in general and

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<sup>11</sup> “The East End Scheme of the United Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 1096 (March 28, 1890): 8.

Judaism in particular, and against the organized Jewish community.<sup>12</sup> Outraged by a sermon delivered by chief rabbi Hermann Adler, one that discussed Jewish working conditions in East London, the demonstrators marched behind a musical band toward the Great Synagogue, denouncing it as a political and religious symbol for the repression of the working classes.

The point here is not that the activities described above rendered the US and the building of London synagogues unsuccessful. The city's religious landscape, after all, counted close to fifteen purpose-built synagogues in the late 1890s, a testimony to the strength and accomplishment of the community's building projects. My point, rather, concerns the complexity of the "synagogue question." If synagogue façades, at a time when bold monumentality became common for synagogues on the continent, were too British and "depressing," in Jamilly's words, then there must be a historical explanation why this was so. If our *Jewish Chronicle* contributor H. confessed that opinions differed greatly among Jews regarding the appearance, location, and function of their religious buildings, then synagogues might have been more than merely "practical" and more closely linked to debates over Anglo-Jewish identity during the Victorian era. And if local resistance to the centralized building policies of the US rendered Jews distinctly visible and audible to the public, exposing clear tensions between native and immigrant Jews, between elites and the working-classes, between US leadership and the Jewish

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<sup>12</sup> The *JC*, which was highly critical of the event, spoke of 300 to 400 marchers, while the left-wing newspaper the *Arbeiter Fraint* (Worker's Friend) counted between 2,000 and 3,000 people. Lloyd P. Gartner also speaks of this demonstration in *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914* (London: Simon Publishers, 1973): 100-116.

public, then Anglo-Jewish history during the high Victorian period might not be as harmonious and undramatic as has sometimes been presumed.<sup>13</sup>

The following pages will illustrate that the story of London synagogues is worth telling. While they may not inspire architectural historians, they are important sites in and around which London Jewry manifested their identities. Their significance, in other words, is to be found not in their aesthetic qualities per se, but in their place and function within Anglo-Jewish life. Before we focus our attention on synagogues, however, we must first widen our lens and examine the larger historical context in which Jewish houses of worship emerged. Synagogue building, as any other historical phenomenon, cannot be understood apart from its moment in time,<sup>14</sup> so let us first turn to Victorian London.

### **A Modern Babylon: London in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century:**

When the first English edition of the Baedeker guide to London appeared in 1877, it admitted to its readers the great challenge of providing “an exhaustive account of so stupendous a city.”<sup>15</sup> This was no overstatement. London was, during most of the Victorian period, not merely the largest city of Great Britain, but the capital of the vast British Empire and the largest metropolis in the world. With a population topping three

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<sup>13</sup> According to Geoffrey Alderman this “public-relations history” camouflaged intracommunal conflict and emphasized instead Jewish progress and consensus. Compared to the turmoil on the continent, after all, Anglo-Jewish history seemed comparatively peaceful and triumphant. The work of Cecil Roth (1899-1970) and Vivian Lipman (1921- 1990), for instance, as well as that of the Jewish Historical Society of England (of which Roth served as president), is well-known for this apologetic dimension. The last decades of the twentieth century, however, witnessed a paradigm shift in Anglo-Jewish history. See Alderman, *Modern British History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), Preface; Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), introduction.

<sup>14</sup> As Marc Bloch so persuasively argued in *The Historian's Craft*, “In a word, a historical phenomenon can never be understood apart from its moment in time. This is true of every evolutionary stage, our own and all others.” Marc Bloch, *The Historians' Craft* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1953), 35.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Priscilla Metcalf's *Victorian London* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 152.

million in the late 1860s, this modern Babylon – as contemporary literati described the city – was expanding in a fitful and almost feverish manner, exhibiting the effects of unregulated capitalist development and imperial supremacy.

As opposed to Amsterdam, which crawled out of a long recession and expanded only after the 1860s and 1870s, London had exhibited uninterrupted growth and prosperity since the early eighteenth century. Benefiting from the decline of Dutch maritime power and from modern industrial innovations at home, it grew into the largest and wealthiest metropolis as early as the 1820s.<sup>16</sup> The rise to economic preeminence had important consequences for London's urban composition. For long Greater London had been a scattered and decentralized city, i.e., a patchwork of small towns, each of which developed around a particular function. Westminster, for instance, was the principal seat of the royal court and the site of government, while the City of London was predominantly a commercial, financial, and residential center.<sup>17</sup> With the onset of the modern period, these interdependent towns expanded and merged into an immense conglomeration, or, in the words of contemporary Charles Eyre Pascoe, into an urban “monster.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Tyack argues that in the 1820s London was “probably the largest city in the world, and certainly the richest. By 1830 the population had risen to over one and a half million – a 50 percent increase over thirty years – and was continuing to grow rapidly through migration from the countryside.” See Geoffrey Tyack, *Sir James Pennethorne and the Making of Victorian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 15. For more on the urban development of London, see John Summerson, *The London Building World of the Eighteen-Sixties* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973); Francis Sheppard, *London, A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Priscilla Metcalf, *Victorian London* (Praeger Publishers, 1973); Peter Ackroyd, *London, the Biography* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2000); H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City* (London: Routledge, 1973); P. J. Waller, *Town, City, and Nation: England, 1850-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> See Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *London: The Unique City* (Penguin Books, 1934): 30.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Eyre Pascoe wrote in 1888 that “[t]his monster London is really a new city. . . new as to its life, its streets, and the social condition of the millions who dwell in them, whose very manners, habits, occupations, and even amusements have undergone as complete change within the past half century as the great city itself.” In Pascoe's *London of To-day* (1888), 24.

Immigration was a key factor in the city's phenomenal growth. Migrants from the countryside as well as immigrants from the continent, attracted by better prospects, settled in unprecedented numbers in the British capital.<sup>19</sup> Long before the immigration wave of the post-1881 period, Jews, particularly from Holland, crossed the English Channel in search of a better future. Irish Catholics arrived in such large numbers that London counted more Irishmen than Dublin and more Catholics than Rome. "People of all ranks, in the most motley variety" could be found in this bustling city, wrote Frederick von Raumer enthusiastically in the 1840s, whose eye seemed particularly drawn to the female half in the crowds. "No where in the whole world," he confessed, "(this may be asserted without fear of contradiction), is such a number of . . . handsome women to be met with."<sup>20</sup> The middle-classes and wealthy elites, too, were drawn to its scene, as were tourists, who could not but feel astonished by its scope. George Godwin, for instance, who concluded in the late 1830s that London had to be "the central spot in the civilized globe," exclaimed that "one cannot . . . reflect upon it as a whole, without feelings, almost, of awe."<sup>21</sup>

Rapid and uncontrolled population growth demanded large-scale metropolitan improvements. London, together with other European cities, had been manageable places before the nineteenth century, despite their apparent lack of planning and unsanitary conditions. Now their unprecedented expansion no longer allowed the disregard of such problems. Outbreaks of typhus and cholera, as Charles Dickens described so hauntingly in *Bleak House*, spread fears among the well-to-do and increased appeals for a healthier

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<sup>19</sup> London was certainly not the only city in England to attract migrants and foreign immigrants. The major industrial centers were Liverpool, Manchester – also known as "Cottonopolis" – Birmingham, and Leeds.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick von Raumer, *England in 1841: Being a Series of Letters Written to Friends in Germany . . .* / (London: John Lee, 1842): 135.

<sup>21</sup> George Godwin, *The Churches of London*, vol. I (1838).

living environment. The “Great Stink” of 1858, in particular, which resulted from an unusually hot summer, insufficient sewage disposal, and a west-blowing wind, intensified public outcries for sanitary reform. The great increase in modes of transportation, too, which put pressure on the existing streets, called for a more centralized approach to city planning. Traffic surveys made in Oxford Street in 1839 showed that 7,000 vehicles – including hackney coaches, omnibuses, and hansom cabs – passed the corner of Newman Street in the eighteen hours between six a.m. and midnight.<sup>22</sup> This number was impressive and growing, and made clear that a concerted effort was required to manage the chaotic flow of traffic and to secure the safety of London residents.

Compared to Amsterdam, where the towing of boats by horses and the lighting of street lanterns by hand was still the norm in the 1850s, London was technologically advanced. It had embarked on a comprehensive program of improvements and could boast of an extensive sewage system (including more than a thousand miles of street sewers), gas street lighting, and new bridges (Westminster, Waterloo, and Southwark), which eased communication with the emerging southern suburbs.<sup>23</sup> The Victoria Embankment, a great engineering achievement in its time, further improved the city’s infrastructure. Public squares, such as Trafalgar Square, designed by the architect John Nash, received their famous place in the cityscape, as did the National Gallery, the British Museum, Piccadilly Circus, Marble Arch, Westminster Palace, and University

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<sup>22</sup> See Priscilla Metcalf, 3. While these numbers were high, they paled in comparison to later traffic polls. An 1891 day-census in the City of London reports that 1,186,094 passengers and vehicles entered the City in a 24-hour period, 92,372 of which were cabs, omnibuses, and “other two and four-wheeled vehicles.” See James Salmon, *Ten Years’ Growth of the City of London, 1881-1891* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Limited, 1891), 47.

<sup>23</sup> That such a reconstruction plan was initiated in 1811, remarked Donald J. Olsen, when the outcome of the Napoleonic wars was still in doubt, was itself a measure of national self-confidence and an opportunistic age. See Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986): 12.

College. Roads were widened and aligned with proper sidewalks, a new railway network was in the making, and a large artery (Regent Street) linked St. James's Park in the south with Regent's Park in the north. The latter project became a triumphant symbol for the capital's success: it seemingly cleared away unsanitary slum properties and relieved traffic congestion; its construction provided an opportunity to incorporate an underground sewer line and to build better housing and shops; and it created a respectable thoroughfare where the well-to-do could parade.<sup>24</sup> "Now for the first time," concluded Prince Pueckler-Muskau on a royal visit to Great Britain, "[London] has the air of a seat of Government, and not of an immeasurable metropolis of 'shopkeepers.'"<sup>25</sup>

These urban improvements dramatically altered London's physical appearance. With its emerging factories, banks and offices, residential quarters, shops, public parks, theaters and private clubs, London metamorphosed into a world center of finance, commerce, culture, and consumption. Already in the late 1820s, James Elmes, the author of *Metropolitan Improvements* (1829), asserted that "the absence of a few months from London produces revolutions in sites, and alterations in appearances, that are almost miraculous, and cause the denizen to feel himself a stranger in his own city."<sup>26</sup> While these changes were rapid and sweeping, they were generally welcomed, not merely as a necessary response to the realities of the day but also as a tool for social engineering. An improved infrastructure, it was believed, similar to man's arterial circulation, would lead to an orderly movement of people and a healthier urban body. Spacious thoroughfares and urban parks – the lungs of the modern city – would thus improve the health and

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<sup>24</sup> Olsen, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Prince Ludwig Heinrich Hermann von Pückler-Muskau (1785-1871), *Tour in England, Ireland and France, in the Years 1826, 1827, 1828 & 1829; With Remarks on the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, and Anecdotes of Distinguished Public Characters* (Zürich: Massie Publishing Co., 1940): 17.

<sup>26</sup> James Elmes, the author of *Metropolitan Improvements* (1829), is quoted in Tyack, 16.

moral habits of the underprivileged masses as they were enticed to leave their physically and morally unwholesome quarters for more civilized spaces. “Immediately [after] a street is widened and a respectable traffic and thoroughfare is established,” wrote the architect Thomas Leverton Donaldson, “then a more respectable class of occupants is induced to come and live in the houses, which will also be improved by the owners to meet the improving nature of the thoroughfare.”<sup>27</sup> Although rather simplistic in their theories – slum clearance and demolition did not solve problems of chronic poverty or immorality – contemporary planners attached great weight to the civilizing role of urban renewal.

Surprisingly, many of these projects were accomplished without an overriding metropolitan authority. Instead, a disorderly jumble of local boards and commissions – there were 84 paving boards alone – initiated programs to develop the city’s infrastructure. Not until 1855, with the creation of the Metropolitan Board of Works, did London have a unified agency responsible for large-scale improvements, although it suffered from corruption scandals and its control over architectural design remained limited. Many expansion projects were therefore the result of local initiative and speculative builders.<sup>28</sup> The latter were predominantly involved in the construction of new residential areas. Particularly in the 1860s, when large numbers of Londoners – including

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Leverton Donaldson, an architect and chairman of the Commission of Sewers for Westminster, is quoted in Tyack, 46. For more on the relationship between urban space and the human body, see Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994). The introduction by railway companies of ‘workmen’s trains’ and workmen’s tickets further induced people to separate work and living space and to move to new districts, for the working-class primarily in the north and north-east of London.

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, contends Summerson, “Victorian London was in this respect the very antithesis of Napoleon III’s Paris. Never was there anything which could be called a public works program. London was a metropolis which grew by the initiative of landlords and builders, by competitive pressures in business, by religious or humanitarian philanthropy, and, in an almost negligible measure, by the action of the central government.” Geoffrey Tyack agrees and argues that London “has always been a monument to the energy of individuals, not the organising power of the state.” See Summerson, 15; Tyack, 311.



middle-class Jews – moved out of the City into new suburbs, speculative builders profited from the erection of relatively inexpensive and standardized dwellings in such areas as Canonbury, Bayswater, Kensington, and Highbury. Better public transportation permitted the separation of home and workplace and transformed previously multi-purpose neighborhoods to homogenous, single-purpose suburbia. According to the District Surveyor's returns, close to 73,000 homes were constructed in the 1860s alone,<sup>29</sup> mostly in neo-Classical design with stucco façades. Indeed, they “lacked any appearance of virtuoso or taste,” complained the *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* in a review of London, “and consist merely of uniform rows of houses, each as like as one egg to another.” A German visitor, Hermann Muthesius, found this “deadening uniformity” equally off-putting. “There are no bends,” he lamented, “no variety, no squares, no grouping to relieve the unease that anyone who strays into these parts must feel.”<sup>30</sup> For the average middle-class Londoner, however, these new suburbs – also known as “stuccovia” – were welcome alternatives to congested inner districts and symbols of bourgeois respectability.

The abundance of building opportunities, both in the private and public sector, gave rise to a new class of urban developers, designers, and craftsmen from which professional architects – especially those who enjoyed a membership in the Royal Institute of British Architecture – increasingly distanced themselves. The former were deemed a necessary evil, reasonably competent in fulfilling the needs of the masses, but questionable in their professional qualifications. They were oftentimes accused of turning the building trade into an industry and the profession of architecture into a business.

While snobbish in their attitudes, critics had a point. One of the results of the booming

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<sup>29</sup> Summerson, 8.

<sup>30</sup> See *Die Allgemeine Bauzeitung* 15 (1850): 276. Hermann Muthesius, *Das Englische Haus* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1904): 163.

building industry was the jumble of architectural styles and building types, the mediocrity of which, especially with regard to suburban development, was hard to deny. “Nothing is more striking in London than the utter confusion and want of plan in the place,” complained Alexander Payne in *The Builder* in 1872. “One man has his warehouse or shop built in Classic; his neighbour adjoins thereto a Gothic building.” London was indeed, in the words of Henry James, “a tremendous chapter of accidents,” where “the absence of style, or rather the *intention* of style, is certainly the most general characteristic.”<sup>31</sup>

London Jewry, only a small minority in this immense city, built their synagogues at a time when aesthetic variety and innovativeness prevailed, granting them a great amount of liberty with respect to synagogue design. Before launching this discussion, however, we need to take a closer look at London’s architectural scene.

### **An Architectural Babel**

The incoherence and heterogeneity of London’s architectural panorama has made the high Victorian period susceptible to criticism, both from contemporaries and from subsequent observers. An editorial in *The Builder* described the city as “a perfect artistic mince-pie, indigestible to any reasonable mortal,” an opinion widely shared by twentieth-century urban and architectural historians. Searching for a national style befitting their modern identity, so the argument goes, presumably left Londoners unguided and confused, an unfortunate state that only came to an end in the post-World War II period.

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander Payne, *The Builder* 30 (1872): 62. Henry James is quoted in Tyack, *Sir James Pennethorne and the Making of Victorian London*, 311.

Much of the city's eclecticism, however, was related to its size and rate of expansion rather than to the quest for a new national identity. London was simply too large to be dominated by one style or standard – cities by their very nature invite diversity. Moreover, stylistic choice often depended on budgets, on time allotted to finish the project, and on the function of the building. Private investors in suburban developments, for instance, preferred to build brick homes with polite neo-Classical façades mainly because it guaranteed a quick completion and a satisfied clientele. The repeal of the brick tax in 1850 and the mechanization of brick-making cut costs significantly, making brick the most preferred building material of its time.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the business sector favored monumental display and welcomed artistic adventure rather than repose. Technological advances and new building materials, such as cast iron, allowed for a reinterpretation of traditional styles. As budgets were oftentimes higher for the construction of banks, hotels, insurance companies, and office blocks, architects were encouraged to experiment and to create buildings that publicly advertised success, status, and foreign connections. Nineteenth-century eclecticism, in other words, was as much a consequence of practicality, a lack of central control, and the availability of choice as it was about the search for a national identity.

What particularly annoyed observers, however, is not the fact that different styles were used for different purposes, but that different forms of external decoration were applied to the same type of building, obscuring even further already unclear standards. Governmental buildings, for instance, appeared in Gothic as well as in Italian Renaissance, and it was not uncommon to find edifices that borrowed freely from a variety of historical periods. Suburbia were predominantly neo-Classical in the 1850s and

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<sup>32</sup> Roger Dixon and Stefan Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978): 15.

60s, but they adopted a picturesque Queen Anne exterior the following decade when mechanical standardization came under increasing attack. Industrial buildings, too, spoke many architectural languages. New functions invited new aesthetic responses, and we consequently encounter factory designs inspired by Egyptian, Venetian Gothic, or semi-Oriental forms.<sup>33</sup> While some contemporaries, such as Sir Charles Barry and John Ruskin, argued that only Gothic architecture truly epitomized British values and that its application constructed a narrative of cultural continuity, their views were not universally accepted. Neither was an exclusive neo-Classicism, which *The Builder* considered “in perfect harmony with the spirit of our own time; which, in its tendencies for luxury, for comfortable living, for love of power, wealth, refinement, sensual enjoyment approaches nearest to the brilliant periods of Roman might, sentiment, and culture.”<sup>34</sup> The prevailing Victorian principles of laissez-faire, individualism, and minimal state intervention thus applied as much to architecture as they did to politics and to economics, leaving the London scene wide open to architectural improvisation.

In comparison to Holland, then, British architecture fit less neatly into rigid ideological and religious categories. While in the former the Gothic style was connected almost exclusively to the Dutch Catholic pillar and had clearly defined religious implications, in Britain it appeared more widely in the secular sphere (e.g., in the Houses

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<sup>33</sup> See Nicholas Taylor, “The Awful Sublimity of the Victorian City: Its Aesthetic and Architectural Origins,” in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. by Harold J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, vol. 2 (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul): 431-447.

<sup>34</sup> “What Road Are We Going?,” *The Builder* (March 30, 1878): 327-28. This question, posed by one of London’s leading architectural journals, was a reaction to the prevailing eclectic mood. In 1864, George Gilbert Scott remarked in his *Personal and Professional Recollections* (1879) that there “has been no end to the oddities introduced. Ruskinism, such as would make Ruskin’s very hair stand on end; Butterfieldism, gone mad with its endless stripings of red and black bricks; architecture so French that a Frenchman would not know it. . . Byzantine in all forms but those used by the Byzantians; mixtures of all or some of these; ‘original’ varieties founded upon knowledge of old styles, or ignorance of them, as the case may be; violent strainings after something very strange, and great successes in producing something very weak; attempts at beauty resulting in ugliness, and attempts at ugliness attended with unhoped-for success.” See John Summerson, “London, The Artifact,” *The Victorian City*, 316.

of Parliament). Gothic elements were also applied to religious edifices other than those belonging to the Anglican Church – the New West End synagogue (1879), for instance, adopted Gothic ornamentation, as did a number of Methodist churches.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, while in Holland the neo-Renaissance carried an explicitly nationalist meaning due to its connection to the Golden Age and its use of local materials, in Great Britain it was merely one architectural language among many. Gothic as well as the picturesque Queen Anne style was considered “British,” although Venetian Baroque, Italian and Greek neo-Classical, and Oriental dialects were equally popular. In Great Britain, in other words, architectural styles seemed less ideologically loaded and did not automatically define one’s religious or political beliefs. Choosing a style, argued Mark Crinson, “implied choosing meanings, but what meaning might be ascribed to any particular style was frequently a contested matter in Victorian architecture.”<sup>36</sup>

However, one feature common to most architectural practice in the high Victorian period, with the clear exception of the commercial realm, was the avoidance of ostentatious display and gaudy ornamentation. The designs of the Metropolitan Board of Works, for instance, were to possess “no architectural pretensions whatsoever” and were to be practical rather than aesthetic in purpose.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, preached *The Builder* in the later sixties, “simplicity is the greatest beauty . . . many things ‘when unadorned are adorned

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<sup>35</sup> A contemporary by the name of Francis Cross remarked in the 1850s that “even the very Methodist body have been vaccinated into a furor for Gothic.” Cross is quoted in Donald J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1976): 43.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Crinson, *Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1996), Preface.

<sup>37</sup> Summerson explains that Londoners in the 1850s and 60s loathed public money being spent on official architecture. Especially in the case of the Poplar and Stepney Sick Asylum, which emerged as a result of the 1867 Metropolitan Poor Act, the architectural qualities were to be plain and practical. See *The London Building World of the Eighteen-Sixties*, 23. A different approach was taken in the business sector and entertainment industry, which produced department stores, hotels, clubs, and restaurants highly extravagant in size and display.

the most.”<sup>38</sup> While a multitude of styles thus appeared on the scene, they generally aimed for respectability rather than flamboyance, thereby adhering to contemporary ideals of propriety and good manners. According to Donald Olsen, this widespread preference for simple elegance had its roots in the 1820s and 1830s. The financial panic of 1825, the cholera epidemic seven years later, and the Great Reform Bill intensified moral scruples about display and generated a growing preference for economic efficiency and sanitary reform rather than beauty.<sup>39</sup> Others linked London’s aesthetic conservatism to the persistence of Puritan ideals of modesty and restraint,<sup>40</sup> while a third and related argument emphasized the British public’s primary focus on the interior and the private rather than on the exterior and the public realm. According to the latter the inward-looking quality of Londoners rendered drawing rooms and parlors more important than a building’s “least worthy side – its outside.”<sup>41</sup> One perceptive German tourist had already discerned this trend during a visit in the 1820s, when he remarked that “Alle ihre Pracht ist nur im Innern der Zimmer, nie im Äusseren zu suchen [their beauty can only be found inside of a room, never on the outside].”<sup>42</sup> While Victorian architecture thus expressed aesthetic individualism and variety, it also reflected the high value placed on privacy and, particularly with respect to public works, an aversion to extravagant frivolities funded by local tax-payers.

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<sup>38</sup> “A New Style,” *The Builder* (December 18, 1869): 1004-1005.

<sup>39</sup> Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art*, 21-25.

<sup>40</sup> Steen Eiler Rasmussen, who found English monumental architecture ordinary and conventional at best, concluded that “London’s contribution to architecture is simplicity. . . . Whether it is Norman Shaw towards the end of the nineteenth century or Edwin Luytens during the twentieth, their great monumental works are dull.” He linked this tendency to English Puritanism, “which seems to have had a lasting influence on English habits. [E]ven rich people who in the eighteenth century in other ways lived luxuriously considered it right and natural to live in houses with hardly any decoration. It was considered refined . . . to get away from all that was pompous.” See Rasmussen, *London: The Unique City*, 171-180.

<sup>41</sup> “On the Revival of the Later Styles of English Gothic,” *The Builder* (January 5, 1878): 17-19.

<sup>42</sup> August Hermann Niemeyer, *Beobachtungen auf Reisen in und ausser Deutschland: nebst Erinnerungen and denkwürdige Lebenserfahrungen und Zeitgenossen in den letzten fünfzig Jahren* (Halle, 1822): 105.

One variation that deserves special attention here is the Oriental style, which was part of the aesthetic palette of nineteenth-century builders and a popular choice for synagogues across Europe. Victorian architects showed a growing interest in the Oriental form – *their* response to a larger cultural phenomenon that gained momentum earlier in the century. The imperial presence of Great Britain in the East, increased travel, and well-publicized events – such as the 1851 Great Exhibition in London’s Crystal Palace – gave rise to a fascination with exotic cultures. This found expression in, among others, new travel guides, museum exhibitions, Lipton’s tea advertisements showing turbaned men sitting on elephants, comfortable ottomans, and oriental soup tureens (fig. 5-6). Novels such as Disraeli’s *The Wondrous Tales of Alroy*, and non-fictional works such as Edward W. Lan’s *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* enjoyed great popularity – the latter went through four editions in the 1840s, its first edition being sold out within a fortnight.<sup>43</sup> Newspaper advertisements and color plates in illustrated magazines, too, included Eastern themes, kindling the fascination with the mysterious Other and defining more clearly what was British by reference of what was foreign.

That a number of professional architects, most of who had never traveled beyond Europe, were drawn to Egyptian, Persian, and Islamic designs should therefore come as no surprise. Owen Jones and John Ruskin, for instance, presented new theories on Oriental forms and experimented with applying Islamic ornaments to conventionally planned houses.<sup>44</sup> Their recognition and approval of eastern architecture encouraged the incorporation of non-European motifs into the English landscape. As a result, a number of unconventional structures appeared on the London scene, such as the Oriental and

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<sup>43</sup> See Mark Crinson, 28.

<sup>44</sup> Owen Jones, for instance, published his seminal *Plan, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra* (London: 1842-45).

Turkish Museum (1854), first located at St. George's Gallery but later moved to Leicester Square, the Imperial Institute in South Kensington (1891), and the Royal Panopticon of Science and Art (1854), both of which featured minarets, domes, and colorful mosaic ornamentation. A decade later, Jones designed an Oriental Court for the South Kensington Museum, which drew its inspiration from the Alhambra in Spain (and which earned him the nick-name "Alhambra Jones"). But also in less predictable places did an eastern influence become visible, such as in pleasure gardens or the Blackfriars railway station, which featured Moorish minarets. Oriental architecture in London, as has sometimes been suggested, was thus not the exclusive property of the Jews. Rather, it was the visual expression of the British public's fascination with the peoples over who they ruled – only one component of London's aesthetic vocabulary.

Jewish architects shared this interest in the Orient, although they embraced the eastern theme as one possibility among many. Similar to their gentile colleagues, they experimented with a range of styles, producing edifices that either adhered to one particular aesthetic or that freely combined different traditions. As a result, synagogues were built in a variety of styles: the Central Synagogue (1870) paid tribute to the Oriental vogue, while the Bayswater (1863) and North London Synagogue (1868) were Italian and the East London Synagogue (1877) "an adaptation of Byzantine work to modern requirements, the exterior [of which] is of the plainest possible character . . . [it] merges with the housing, making no imposing statement."<sup>45</sup> The New West End building (1879), on the other hand, adopted a highly eclectic exterior with Romanesque overtones. London synagogues, in other words, were *Victorian* buildings, reflecting the aesthetic complexity

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<sup>45</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/ELS/001: "East London Synagogue." See also the *JC*, no. 369 (April 21, 1876): 38-39; *JC* (April 25, 1873).



and richness of the urban scene. Those architects who selected Moorish design elements did so not because it was a “Jewish style,” but because it was part of the fashionable architectural idiom of the day.

That Anglo-Jews felt comfortable with a variety of aesthetic tradition is apparent in the minutes of the building committee of the Central Synagogue. In the late 1860s, the congregation hired Nathan Solomon Joseph (1834-1909), the future architect-surveyor of the United Synagogue and the brother-in-law of Hermann Adler, to design a new building in Portland Street. Joseph was a strong advocate of Moorish architecture, which he found “most in consonance with the sacred character of the building.” He was of the opinion that

[t]here is little choice of style for a synagogue. Gothic architecture is scarcely admissible, being essentially Christian in its origin, its forms, and its symbols; and Classic architecture ought to be regarded in the same light, being in fact Pagan architecture. Of the more modern adaptations and compromises of styles, none appear to me sufficiently dignified for an ecclesiastical edifice like ours. The Moresque seemed to me to be that which recommended itself on the score of its dignity, its Eastern origin, its elasticity of adjustment to internal requirements, its economy of space, and even economy of material.<sup>46</sup>

However, while the committee members appreciated these views, they believed there were more options available to them. “As regards the design and style of architecture,” states an 1868 report, “the committee, desirous to afford the opportunity of comparison, as between the Moresque and the Italian styles, directed Mr. Joseph to prepare a design in the Italian style.” This request was in part related to concerns over expenses. Joseph’s first Moorish design contained elaborate ornamentation and plastered walls, which the committee feared would significantly increase the cost of the building and “they therefore expressed a wish to [also] see a drawing in the same style, but with less decoration.”

After submitting his first proposal, Joseph was therefore asked to return to the drawing

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<sup>46</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/ CRS/001, p. 31: “Report of the Building and Finance Committees, Submitted to the Vestry of the Great Synagogue 2nd February, 5628-1868.” Joseph’s report is dated December 19, 1867.

board and produce two additional designs, i.e., one with Italian and another with modified Moorish features. The architect complied with the committee's wishes, but could not hide his discontent. "I feel it my duty to point out," he replied in a strong-worded letter to committee members, "that the design herewith submitted . . . is rigidly simple, depending mainly upon its magnitude and proportions for effect; and it is quite likely that it will fail to satisfy those who will perhaps not unreasonably expect a handsome building, with a fair amount of decoration." After the building and finance committees had reviewed the various proposals, they came to the conclusion that there was but "little difference, financially, between the cost of the Moresque and Italian styles" and that "the first Moresque design was, on the whole, preferable." However, "being informed by the architect that it could be adapted to a less amount of ornamentation, and that some expense might thus be saved, they suggest that the general design should be adopted, and that the details of the decoration should be left to be determined by the building committee, according to the amount of the disposable funds." In the end, then, the Moorish design was deemed preferable, not because it was the only option deemed appropriate for Jews – although Joseph believed it was – or because it made an effective ideological statement to the public, but because it was a satisfactory combination of dignity and affordability.

An intriguing detail that reinforces this argument is a correction made in the 1867 minutes, which state that Joseph submitted a "plan for the synagogue as prepared in the Byzantine style."<sup>47</sup> The word "Byzantine," however, is crossed out and changed to "Moorish," which reflects either the temporary absentmindedness of the note-taker or the committee's uncertainty about the architectural style under review. Whether the

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<sup>47</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/CRS/001, p. 19: "Central Synagogue. Minutes of Subcommittee," May 8, 1867.

synagogue's external features were Italian, Byzantine, or Moorish did not matter; of more importance was the way in which any style or mixture of styles was handled: "We desire to see due solemnity combined with chaste beauty, the beauty of serious simplicity," wrote the *Jewish Chronicle* in an 1869 editorial. "As regards the external building, we do not hesitate to say that this view has been precisely carried out. The [Central Synagogue] will be an ornament to the metropolis. Yet there is nothing meretricious in its exterior."<sup>48</sup> The United Synagogue, founded in the same year as the Central Synagogue's inauguration, adopted this strategy during the following three decades, producing buildings that blended in rather than stood out from their immediate environment. It built unimposing synagogues not out of insecurity or a desire to remain unnoticed, but because it was a public expression of bourgeois respectability. Why the US was so committed to cultural conformity, and why it followed a different trend with regard to synagogue building than their brethren on the continent, is related to the socio-political and demographic profile of London Jewry, a topic to which we will now turn.

### **"From East-End to West-End, From Worst End to Best End"<sup>49</sup>: Jewish Life in London**

London Jewry exuded a great sense of optimism and confidence in its own status during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. It had good reason to do so. Jews lived in a booming world city where religious liberty was the norm, where economic opportunities were plenty, and where emancipation, albeit granted in piecemeal fashion, was unconditional. Compared to some of their European counterparts, the Anglo-Jewish

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<sup>48</sup> "The Central Synagogue," *JC*, no. 31 (October 29, 1869): 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> This jingle by Renton Nicholson appeared in his *Autobiography of a Fast Man* (1863). Quoted by P. J. Keating, "Fact and Fiction in the East End," in Dyos and Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City*, 588.

community drew relatively little public attention and was not singled out as a threat to the prevailing social and religious order.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Anglo-Jewry (20-25,000 people in the 1850s) had become a middle-class community. With a relatively small number of recent immigrants – the majority of Jews came from families who had settled in London in the second half of the eighteenth century<sup>51</sup> – the established community showed signs of economic mobility and embourgeoisement. For instance, beginning in the early nineteenth century, a growing number of Jews followed gentile residential patterns and moved to better neighborhoods in west London. The very act of moving to outer districts, where “the Jewish population settled thick as bees in a grove,”<sup>52</sup> was perceived as a sign of successful acculturation.

Rising prosperity also manifested itself in the establishment of a remarkable network of philanthropic institutions, such as the Jewish Board of Guardians (1859), which was designed to offer financial assistance and moral guidance to the less fortunate. The centralization and consolidating of relief work reflected communal leaders’ belief in making Anglo-Jewry a true product of the contemporary age, i.e., a prosperous, highly acculturated, respectable, and self-sufficient community. It simultaneously reflected their desire to rationalize and control charity and poor relief, the “disorderly” nature of which received the disapproval by Jewish officials. That the latter felt confident in its efforts is

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<sup>50</sup> Indeed, argues Todd Endelman, “[i]n Britain the debates tended to focus less on the habits of the Jews than on the nature of the state and the place of the established church and its adherents within it.” See *The Jews of Britain*, 108.

<sup>51</sup> See Vivian David Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950* (London: Watts, 1954): 9. The number of Jews in London increased to some 40,000 in 1880 and, due to immigration in the 1880s and 1890s, to some 180,000 in 1914. For further information on the number of Jews in London see Stephen Sharot, “Native Jewry and the Religious Anglicization of Immigrants in London, 1870-1905,” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 16: 1 (June 1974): 39-56; Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 1-3; John Mills, *The British Jews* (London, 1853), 256; Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols (London, 1861-1862).

<sup>52</sup> “Retrospect of the Year,” *JC*, no. 183 (September 27, 1872): 356.

illustrated in an 1872 editorial in the *Jewish Chronicle*, which boasted of London as “the great centre of active Jewish life throughout the civilized world . . . Here the social status of the Jews holds the most eminent and world-influencing position.” Indeed, argued the editors, the condition of London Jewry “is of vital moment to the interest of the Jews and the cause of Judaism throughout the world . . . he who fails to see that in all respects the Jewish community of England has entered on a new era of its history, must be blind indeed.”<sup>53</sup> London Jews were highly optimistic about their own importance on the world scene – an outlook that would be challenged in the 1880s and 1890s – and unaware of the long-term consequences of living in a religiously tolerant but culturally rigid society.<sup>54</sup>

Until the 1860s, the majority of Jews resided in the City of London and in neighboring Whitechapel. Small nuclei could be found as well in the Strand, Covent Garden, and Pall Mall. While the Sephardim had begun to fan out to western districts in earlier decades and small numbers of prosperous Ashkenazim had settled in the West End, Finsbury, Marylebone, and Bloomsbury in the 1840s, the residential exodus of Jews – as well as gentiles – from the City did not begin until the 1860s. Dalston and Hackney to the north saw an influx of predominantly lower middle class families, while more affluent Jews moved to western and northwestern districts such as Bayswater, Maida Vale, Highbury, St. John’s Wood, and West Hampstead. Moreover, an increasing number settled in Whitechapel, which expanded the area of Jewish settlement in the East End, particularly around Whitechapel Road and Commercial Road, two arteries that had emerged in mid-century to connect the City with the docks in the south-east. Whereas

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<sup>53</sup> “The Communal Revival,” *JC*, no. 234 (October 24, 1873): 497-498; “The Synagogue Question,” *JC*, no. 152 (February 23, 1872): 8-10.

<sup>54</sup> The *JC* described the Anglo-Jewish community as “the mistress of an empire on which the sun never sets, by its happily forming an integral part of a nation belonging to the most powerful, most humane and civilised on earth.” See “Our Mission,” *JC*, no. 369 (April 21, 1876): 40.

before the 1850s Jewish settlement had primarily occurred around Duke's Place and Petticoat Lane, the cessation of this district as a residential hub, the rise in City land (and rent) prices, and the growth of the railway system encouraged the relocation of the Jewish quarter in an eastward direction.<sup>55</sup>

Jewish residential patterns in London thus differed significantly from those in Amsterdam. In the latter Jews remained highly concentrated in one residential area, one that expanded on the margins but that kept its historic core intact. As the previous chapter illustrates, Amsterdam Jews had no desire to resettle in western districts and relocated instead to better streets and avenues on the periphery of the Jewish quarter. Residential dispersal was not seen as a mark of respectability. The Jewish district therefore remained a socially and economically heterogeneous space where the poor and the affluent, the Orthodox and the secular, continued to live and work together. As conditions for Jews slowly improved, the Jewish neighborhood became infused with new cultural and philanthropic institutions, maintaining the visibility of Jewish life in the urban landscape. In London, however, middle-class ambitions encouraged social segregation, prompting well-to-do Jews to leave the congested and noisy center and to form new enclaves

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<sup>55</sup> See Gartner, 146-150; Vivian Lipman, "The Rise of Jewish Suburbia," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1968): 78-102; Endelman, 94-95; R. Kalman, "The Jewish East End – Where Was It?," in Aubrey Newman (ed.), *The Jewish East End 1840-1939* (London: 1981): 3-15. Gartner pointed out that Jewish settlement in streets immediately adjoining the City on the east, particularly in Goodman's Fields and Houndsditch, dated back to the eighteenth century. Jews concentrated in these areas because, as non-freemen, they could not open retail shops in the City and because they would be near the second-hand clothes markets in Cutler Street and Rosemary Lane. Moreover, the Goodman's Field area attracted well-to-do merchants due to its fine residences and respectable merchant populace. From the 1860s onwards, increasing numbers of Jews and non-Jews separated their work place from their residence and left the City. While in 1861 the City of London counted a population of 112,063, thirty years later this had dropped to 37,694. Similarly, while the City counted 13,431 inhabited houses at a total property value of 1,279,887 pounds in 1861, thirty years later 5,819 residences were left but at a value of 3,872,088 pounds. With better transportation and more affordable housing elsewhere, Londoners left the City in large numbers. See Salmon, *Ten Years' Growth of the City of London, 1881-1891*, 13.

elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> “We are not exaggerating,” wrote the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1872 with regard to neighborhoods in west London, “if we state that we could name certain streets . . . in which every third house is rented by a Jewish family.”<sup>57</sup> Jews again flocked together, founding new synagogues in their immediate vicinity. Suburbanization and the creation of new Jewish settlements in places all over the city were so successful that *The Jewish Standard* reported in 1890 that “there is no single district in London of which it can accurately be said ‘This is the centre of Judaism.’”<sup>58</sup> But while this assessment may have been true from a residential point of view, it is incorrect with respect to Jewish culture and philanthropy, the center of which remained located in the City and the East End. Walking through new districts, one did not come face to face with Jewish almshouses such as that of Joel Emanuel at Wellclose Square, Yiddish theater buildings such as the Pavilion Theatre at the corner of Vallance Road and Whitechapel Road, Jewish hospitals such as the one at Mile End, open-air markets such as the orange and nut markets in Duke’s Place, the Jewish Board of Guardians building such as that in Devonshire Square, or the Jews’ Free School as in Bell Lane, Spitalfields. Urban signs of a Jewish presence were largely absent in suburban neighborhoods and migrating Jews were no longer immersed in Jewish life.

Socio-economically, too, London Jewry during the third quarter of the nineteenth century differed substantially from its Amsterdam counterpart. While Dutch Jews were overwhelmingly poor and working-class, experiencing wide-spread economic mobility only at the turn of the century, London Jewry fared much better much earlier. Vivian

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<sup>56</sup> According to Todd Endelman these new colonies of Jews settling in the suburbs suggest that “the drive for full or complete assimilation into English society was not a primary focus in the process of suburbanization.” See *The Jews of Britain*, 95.

<sup>57</sup> “The Synagogue Question,” *JC*, no. 158 (April 5, 1872): 8-9.

<sup>58</sup> Oswald John Simon, “The Future Chief Rabbi,” *The Jewish Standard* (October 3, 1890): 9.

Lipman's estimates show that already by 1850 some thirty percent of the community belonged to the middle class, a number that would rise in the decades preceding mass immigration, when the majority of Jews reached middle-class status.<sup>59</sup> While many were engaged in commerce, trade, and business, a small number of Jews had entered the free professions and made successful careers as physicians, lawyers, and architects. Most Jews had internalized British norms and behavior: they adopted popular dress and enjoyed tea in the afternoon, they became members of respectable gentlemen's clubs, and they sent their children to public schools. "We are no longer aliens," stated the *Chronicle*, "we are not a segregated people. We are English to all intents and purposes – and this without losing one atom of our Jewish oneness, our Jewish fraternity and community, and our Jewish hopes."<sup>60</sup> Aside from the occasional Jewish stereotype in the press, perpetually distasteful and insulting, London Jewry generally felt fortunate and optimistic about its future in the British Empire.

One area in which the dual identity of Anglo Jews came to the fore is synagogue practice, which was refashioned to accentuate a growing commitment to Victorian culture. The Chief Rabbi, Nathan Marcus Adler (1803-1890), the central authority over religious and educational affairs in Great Britain, prescribed a service that incorporated

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<sup>59</sup>Vivian Lipman, "The Structure of London Jewry in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. by H. J. Zimmels, J. Rabinowitz, and I. Finestein, vol. 1 (London, 1967): 253-273; Lipman, "A Survey of Anglo-Jewry in 1851," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 17 (1953): 171-188; Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950* (London, 1954). The nineteenth-century social scientist Joseph Jacobs also studied the economic mobility of London Jews, the findings of which he published in the *JC* in the early 1880s. He estimated that almost 15 percent belonged to the financial elites, while more than 42 percent was middle-class. Endelman correctly points out that these numbers were likely to be even higher as the rising number of immigrants diluted the statistics of the established community.

<sup>60</sup>"Enlargement of the *Jewish Chronicle*," *JC*, no. 705 (June 26, 1868): 4.



bourgeois notions of decorum and gentility.<sup>61</sup> This meant that clergy wore Christian-inspired ecclesiastical costumes and worshippers appeared in long coats and top hats. One beadle in the New Synagogue made it a habit to refuse entry to worshippers “wearing any other hat than the high hat of modern civilization,” sparking letters of protest in the *Jewish Chronicle*. Strangers who wore a “wide-awake” rather than the “chimney pot hat – the insignia of respectability,” remarked one correspondent, should at least be informed by a notice on the synagogue door that read: “Abandon ‘wideawakes’ all ye who enter here!”<sup>62</sup> Regulations over attire were complemented by moderate changes in ritual. The *shaharit* or morning service, for instance, began at a later time to accommodate the appropriate hour of breakfast; *misheberachs* were abolished; English sermons were introduced; and those *piyyutim*, or liturgical hymns, that called for avenging the death of Jewish martyrs were omitted.<sup>63</sup> These cosmetic reforms created an

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<sup>61</sup> Some historians have described Adler as a staunch supporter of “progressive conservatism,” although this has proven to be a contested term. One document in the LMA from 1936 described it as follows: “Progressive Conservatism which the US itself exemplifies, rejecting on the one hand the clamour of those who, in the desire for constant change, would recklessly cast aside tradition; and on the other, the invitation of those who regard all things as settled, deluding themselves with the pretence that time and environment and circumstances are factors of no account, as though our lives and our mutual relationships are not susceptible to change; with the acceptance of tradition as a living force, and not as a dead weight” (ACC 2712.14.3d). One might argue that the US’s views on reform thus differed little from that of Dutch Jewish leaders in Amsterdam. Both realized moderate alterations appeased the community and took away the appeal of a German-style Reform movement. “What we do not want,” stated the *JC* in 1879, “is a revolutionized service – a service which would satisfy a few to the exclusion of many . . . The mournful results which have attended in some instances the reform movement in Germany and America are due only to the attractions which the ideas of Reform, without regard to the consequences of its execution, has had for many impressionable minds.” See “Revision of the Ritual,” *JC*, no. 535 (June 27, 1879): 9-10. To avoid this “shipwreck,” the Chief Rabbi acted with calculated caution. He approved aesthetic reforms as long as Halakhic laws remained unchallenged. For a discussion of London’s Chief Rabbinate, or “mono-rabbinism,” see Stephen Sharot, “Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870-1914: Rabbinate and Clergy,” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 15: 2 (December 1973): 167-188; Miri J. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> “‘Wideawakes’ in Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 369 (April 21, 1876): 36.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion on modifications of the ritual see the United Synagogue minutes of a conference held in October 1879 regarding synagogue reform, LMA: ACC 2712/002/001: “Conference of Delegates to Consider Modifications in the Services of the Synagogues,” p. 759. Lionel Cohen stated at this conference that “[t]he present juncture appears opportune for the consideration of a moderate, judicious and temperate movement in the direction of an improved and simpler service. The nature of the present movement is

Orthodox service that remained faithful to *halakhah* but was nonetheless dignified and “modern” – a successful formula that weakened the appeal of Reform Judaism well into the twentieth century.

The largely cosmetic character of synagogue reforms suggests that London Jews, as opposed to their Berlin coreligionists, did not feel compelled to “modernize” Judaism. The majority had no fear of political exclusion and had no aspirations to denationalize Jewish worship. This does not mean, however, that modifications always resulted from consensus or that there were no subtle cultural pressures. The latter revealed themselves, for instance, in discussions over synagogue choirs, which consistently linked choral singing to gentile public opinion. While some Jewish traditionalists objected to choirs altogether and regretted turning the synagogue into “an opera house,” others forcibly argued they “would be the means of placing us on a par with Christians in devotional matters,” allowing Jews to no longer “feel discouraged, disgusted, and ashamed” with regard to their religious conduct.<sup>64</sup> Church services thus regularly served as a benchmark for religious etiquette. Among Christians, wrote H., young boys of high social standing took pride in becoming choir members, a tradition he found very sensible as it not merely “procured proper and decorous sacred vocalization,” but also kept youngsters off the streets and improved their physical health. Singing, after all, “acts on the pulmonary organs with advantage and duly expands the chest – a matter of moment to a school boy who stoops over a desk for many hours of the day.”<sup>65</sup> An anonymous correspondent, who

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essentially conservative in its character.” See also Stephen Sharot, “Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870-1914: the Synagogue Service,” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 15: 1 (June 1973): 57-78.

<sup>64</sup> “Devotion and Choral Singing,” *JC*, no. 687 (Feb. 14, 1868): 3; “Synagogue Singing,” *JC*, no. 38 (December 17, 1869): 8. Please note that a synagogue choir differs from the two or three male voices that accompanied the cantor.

<sup>65</sup> “The Music of the Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 684 (January 24, 1868):4-5; “Synagogue Singing,” *JC*, no. 56 (April 22, 1870): 7.

equally regretted “the present want of available boy-power,” added that teaching Jewish boys to sing “is a mightily refining and humanising element; it softens their hearts.”<sup>66</sup> Synagogue choirs would not merely dignify the religious service; they would also produce the kind of cultivated gentlemen that Victorian culture esteemed so highly. One contributor, however, maintained that a boys’ choir alone was not enough, that an organ was required for “instrumental music in the synagogue undoubtedly contributes in a very high degree to the impressiveness of divine service.” The question of a choir, in other words, became a measure for the level of acculturation. In the 1860s some found the choir too radical, while others considered it an acceptable way to “render our services agreeable, suitable, and congruous – services worthy of their [i.e. Christian] object, and capable of gaining our sympathy and of evoking our pride.”<sup>67</sup>

The quality of choral singing, too, was a topic of great concern as it apparently left much to be desired and caused embarrassment. “As it is,” reported an editorial in 1872, “we fear we sometimes horrify Christian visitors by our peculiar choral performances – perhaps we should say choral delinquencies.” Indeed, Jews were unfailingly critical of the quality of synagogue choirs throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, describing their young members as “strangling orphans” and “free and easy souls, [who] adopt the Champagne Charley style, and wear the hat in the slouching *brifaud* fashion over one eye, as if they were going to sing ‘We won’t go home till morning’ instead of ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts!’” One worshipper who called himself Nemo the Second complained, after attending the Bayswater synagogue, that he “was not quite sure whether [he] heard a ‘band of brothers’ singing outside a

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<sup>66</sup> “Synagogue Singing,” *JC*, no. 3 (July 17, 1868): 4.

<sup>67</sup> H., “Synagogue Singing,” *JC*, no. 703 (June 5, 1868): 5.

neighbouring public-house, or a troop of miners out on strike.” Things were not much better in 1889, when a correspondent reported in despair that the singing in London synagogues had “sunk to so desperate a state that, instead of leaving something to be desired, it leaves nothing to hope for . . . [it is like] peas for the pilgrims’ shoes.”<sup>68</sup> Congregants were so critical because they attached great weight to reverence, and considered inferior choral performances as an inferior representation of themselves. Of course it is also possible that the singing was bad, period!

One way of improving the quality of the choir was to include female voices, which provoked a short-lived but intense debate in the early 1870s. *Halakhah* permits males to sing in a synagogue choir, but not females. Some attempted to find a compromise by making women singers audible but still invisible. “[A]s it would be out of keeping with orthodox principles of our synagogues for the ladies to *appear* to take part in the service,” stated An Amateur in the *Jewish Chronicle*, “let them be placed behind a grating or screen.” Female voices that mysteriously emerged out of nowhere were, according to this reader, an intelligent way to improve matters. Another contributor, who wrote under the pseudonym Asaph Klesmer and who presented himself as a great proponent of music in the synagogue, agreed that the question of female admission to the choir depended mostly “on the *position* of that body, whether on the *Almemmar* or in a gallery withdrawn from public gaze.” By placing women in the upper gallery or behind the ark, the community would only indirectly defy Jewish customs. Klesmer himself, however, admitted – as did most Jews at the time – that Jewish women would better fulfill their duty by encouraging their sons to sing instead. One official of the Central

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<sup>68</sup> “Synagogue Choirs,” *JC*, no. 164 (May 17, 1872): 88; Nemo, “Synagogue Singing,” *JC*, no. 193 (December 6, 1872): 490-491; Nemo the Second, “Harmony in Bayswater,” *JC*, no. 220 (June 13, 1873): 179; A Candid Critic, “Synagogue Music,” *JC*, no. 1043 (March 22, 1889): 3.

Synagogue dryly added that choirs “be removed outside the building altogether, so as to be entirely inaudible as well as invisible.”<sup>69</sup>

The point here is not that choirs made congregants’ toes curl or that singing was believed to be beneficial to one’s physical health or moral character. Of more importance is that the discussions over choirs and organs, over sermons and pulpits, and over the visibility of women revolved around the issue of Jewish particularism and Jewish modernization. The synagogue became a site where questions of acculturation, traditionalism, and Jewish identity became particularly pressing. The debates over music in the synagogue, together with the gradual introduction of choir galleries in synagogue design, suggest that the majority of native Jews embraced modifications as long as they did not require doctrinal reform. Worshippers wanted to be perceived as sophisticated and genteel Jews, but as Jews nonetheless. Many therefore welcomed changes that improved decorum and created a socially pleasant environment, but they typically disapproved of alterations that could not be justified according to Jewish law. A boys’ choir was thus an “emollient to manners,” whereas an organ remained a “musical prayer machine” inappropriate in a Jewish house of worship.<sup>70</sup> A growing number of new

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<sup>69</sup> An Amateur, “Synagogue Singing,” *JC*, no. 58 (May 6, 1870); Asaph Klesmer, “Music in the Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 966 (September 30, 1887): 12-13; Cathedral, “The Central Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 189 (November 8, 1872). That the Central Synagogue official, who called himself “Cathedral,” felt quite strongly about the subject of female choir members is suggested by an editorial comment inserted in his letter that stated: “Here follows a censure on the worthy official of the congregation which we feel it our duty to decline to insert.” Female voices were incorporated into the choir of the New West End, Hampstead, and East London Synagogues in the mid-1890s, although they did remain separated from the male singers and were placed behind a screen. According to Karla Goldman, the chief rabbi Nathan Adler commented on the issue of female voices in a response to an inquiry from American worshipers in regard to the anticipated performance of the dedication choir at Shaaray Tefila, a congregation in New York. “It is by no means correct,” wrote Adler in 1847, “to permit ladies to assist with their vocal powers at the consecration of a synagogue.” According to Goldman, Adler feared that female voices in the synagogue might lead to the more prominent participation of women in public worship. See Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 85.

<sup>70</sup> “Congregational Singing,” *JC*, no. 83 (October 28, 1870): 6-7.

synagogues thus featured vestibules where male and female worshippers could mingle after the service and where Jews could give expression to a more family-based religion, but they maintained strictly separate seating arrangements in the main body of the synagogue. And while Jewish men wore fashionable chimney-pot hats in the synagogue, they wore them throughout the service, unlike Christians. Jewish particularism, in other words, was maintained, but it was presented in Victorian packaging.

One consequence of the native community's enthusiasm for cosmetic reforms was the gradual expansion of the synagogue interior as exclusively a place for divine worship. For instance, it became common in the nineteenth century to celebrate weddings inside of a synagogue as opposed to a garden or residential home, an event which allowed the mingling of men and women in an otherwise strictly segregated space. The 1881 edition of *The Graphic* featured an illustration of the wedding of Leopold de Rothschild and Marie Perugia in front of the ark of the Central Synagogue (fig. 7-8). Not only was Great Portland Street "thronged with spectators waiting to see the arrival and departure of the wedding party," the main hall of the synagogue, too, "was occupied with ladies in bright costumes."<sup>71</sup> The *chupa*, or bridal canopy, was placed between the ark and the bimah, around which couples in festive attire observed the events. Decorative palm trees, ferns, and flowers created a celebratory ambiance. Interestingly, *The Graphic* reports that the nuptial ceremony began with an ordinary Wednesday afternoon service, after which the bridal procession entered the synagogue and "the ladies in the front rows cast basketfuls

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<sup>71</sup> See *The Graphic* (January 29, 1881). Not only high-society weddings took place in synagogues; so-called cheap weddings also became commonplace. By lowering fees, Jewish leadership tried to encourage marriage among Jews, i.e., the signing of a nuptial agreement that would be recognized by the state as legally binding, as opposed to "illegal" Jewish marriage contracts drawn up by local East European rabbis. The first choral wedding at the New West End Synagogue took place in 1880, which set a precedent for other middle-class congregations. The *JC* reported in 1882 that "the custom has taken root among us even in the most orthodox circles." For more on Jewish Sharot, "Religious Change," 68.

of white flowers” on the floor. Whether these ladies had been seated next to their male companions all along, or whether they had quickly moved from the galleries to the main floor just before the wedding ceremony commenced and the synagogue changed functions, remains a mystery. Of importance, however, is that the synagogue space itself was transformed in a way that allowed for the relaxation of Orthodox traditions and religious law.

Sermons, too, added a new dimension to the synagogue. We learn from contemporary sources that Anglo-Jewish sermons generally “kept clear of intellectual affectations”<sup>72</sup> and oftentimes addressed socio-economic matters. The chief rabbi, for instance, discussed on numerous occasions the working conditions of the Jewish poor. Using the pulpit as a political platform, he warned congregations of the potentially toxic mix of poverty, socialist ideas, and large numbers of immigrants. Adler also presented, by invitation, a sermon on the sweating system in the Great Synagogue in the late 1880s, during which he admitted that sweating was a necessary evil that fed many mouths. His remark that “if sweating meant overwork, then he and many of his wealthy congregants were equally victims with the East European immigrants,” was one of the catalysts that led to the Synagogue Parade on a Saturday in March 1889.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to addressing socio-economic realities, sermons promoted moral improvement or what in Germany came to be known as *bürgerliche Verbesserung*. They

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<sup>72</sup> “Sermons,” *JC*, no. 502 (November 8, 1878): 9-10.

<sup>73</sup> See Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, 115. Gartner writes that Adler – together with the religious heads of the Anglican and Catholic Church – was asked to publicly speak out against the sweating conditions in East London, which had come under close scrutiny in John Burnett’s reports and in testimony before the House of Lords Sweating Commission. Adler supposedly argued these reports were exaggerated, which incensed many working-class Jews. In response, the latter organized a “synagogue parade” to the Great Synagogue on Saturday, March 16, during which poor, mostly socialist Jews protested the passivity and authority of the Jewish establishment. For a discussion of this procession, see Gartner, 116-118.

reflected the aspiration on the part of Anglo-Jewish officials to conform to bourgeois expressions of religiosity and respectability. The discourse about London sermons, however, reveals subtle differences with that of other places. Compared to Berlin, for instance, where the quest for personal *Bildung* suffused the sermon, London sermons seemed to focus on communal progress rather than on individual transcendence, on lifting the working classes up by their boot straps by example rather than on cultivating the inner self. The synagogue was “a house in which men learn real brotherhood; in which they learn how to pray for each other and how to be responsible for each other before the tribunal of Heaven”; it was not a house for individual growth.<sup>74</sup> This might explain why sermons were not always well-received by the Anglo-Jewish public. Many acculturated Jews in London, not particularly known for their deep commitment to intellectual cultivation, believed that it was not they themselves but others who were in need of moral improvement, i.e., the poor, the indifferent, the radical. It was therefore not uncommon for “goody-goody sermons”<sup>75</sup> to be perceived as unnecessarily prolonging the service and better suited for East End synagogues. “We must make up our minds,” admitted a seatholder of the Bayswater synagogue, “to accept the very unwelcome conclusion that the desire for pulpit instruction is not as intense as it was imagined to be by those who have always persisted in believing in the religious progress of the community . . . there is but a feeble desire for sermons stirring in the communal mind.”<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, while their reception might have been lukewarm, their implementation further extended the synagogue as a site for both religious and non-religious encounters.

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<sup>74</sup> “Dedication of Sandy’s Row Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 85 (November 11, 1870): 5-7.

<sup>75</sup> “Sermons,” *JC*, no. 502 (November 8, 1878): 9-10.

<sup>76</sup> “Sermons,” *JC*, no. 529 (May 16, 1879): 9-10.



National politics also made an appearance in the synagogue. An illustration in an 1893 edition of *The Graphic* shows Francis Lyon Cohen conducting a special Hanukkah service held for Jewish soldiers and volunteers in the Borough Synagogue (fig. 9). Approximately a hundred Jewish officers and privates, all dressed in army uniforms and helmets, attended the “quite unprecedented ceremonial.” Cohen apparently preached “a militant sermon” from his pulpit, which for the occasion was draped with a silken Union Jack. Additional flags and military trophies were displayed, causing the synagogue to take on the appearance of its audience as opposed to worshippers conforming to the religious authority of the synagogue. The event, reported Lucien Wolf in *The Graphic*, had a clear political purpose. It was “designed to refute the strange delusion . . . that Jews have no taste or capacity for soldiering” and that they were quite capable of military excellence.<sup>77</sup> By enumerating the Jews’ participation in historical battles and by quite literally depicting the Jews’ commitment to their faith as well as to England, the *Graphic* publicly denounced the long-held view of the Jew as physically weak and unpatriotic. The synagogue was a space not for Orthodox Jews who happened to live in England but for loyal citizens whose faith happened to be Jewish.

This event gave physical expression to the realization that the synagogue had expanded its function – an evolution that the *Jewish Chronicle* had already referred to in the late 1860s. “It is impossible for us to overrate the importance of a synagogue,” it wrote in an editorial on the proposed North London Synagogue.

It is not only a temple of worship where the faithful assemble for their prayers; no, no, it has a political as well as religious interest . . . When a perfect edifice is constructed – and it now depends upon you whether it will be perfect – it will not stand there a dumb pile of glory. Every service which is celebrated within its walls, every sermon preached from the pulpit, every chant uttered in praise of the Lord, will be as many records of your exertions; they will be as many

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<sup>77</sup> Lucien Wolf, “Jewish Soldiers,” *The Graphic* 48, no. 1,256 (December 23, 1893): 782. The illustration of soldiers attending the Hanukah service in the Borough Synagogue is featured on this issue’s front page.

proofs of the noble spirit which animated you, as many tokens of the benevolence and charity which form so characteristic a feature of our ancient race.<sup>78</sup>

At a time when acculturated Anglo Jews had entered the socio-economic and political realms of British society, their synagogues equally expanded their boundaries. By the second half of the nineteenth century the latter were more than merely houses of prayer and assembly; they were microcosms of Jewish life in London. “The purpose of the synagogue itself had been enlarged and extended,” stated the twenty-fifth annual report of the United Synagogue in 1895. “It is no longer a meeting house for prayer only. It has been made a rallying point and a centre for communal work, where men and women of all shades of thought and opinion may meet to promote the welfare of the community in general.”<sup>79</sup> Synagogues thus staged Victorian propriety, highly charged sermons on political and economic actualities, marriage ceremonies, and, in the case of the 1889 synagogue parade, angry protesters demanding better working conditions for the poor. Ironically, then, synagogues became far better representatives of the Anglo-Jewish experience at a time when growing secularization decreased their centrality in many a Jew’s life.

### **“The Religious Parliament of the London Jews”<sup>80</sup>: The United Synagogue**

The demographic dispersal of London Jews over the course of the 1860s and the decline of membership of the City synagogues caused concern among Jewish officials. The loss of membership fees jeopardized the existence of these historically central but now increasingly peripheral synagogues, leaving the burden of their upkeep largely in the

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<sup>78</sup> “The Proposed North London Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 636 (February 22, 1867): 5-6.

<sup>79</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/14/13/14: “Twenty-fifth Annual Report” (1895).

<sup>80</sup> “The Accounts of the United Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 516 (February 14, 1879): 9.

hand of the less affluent. In 1850 the three main Ashkenazi congregations still had about 2,000 members and seat-holders, approximately ten percent of the London Jewish population, but this number was rapidly declining. Moreover, as economically mobile Jews were founding congregations on their own, they were no longer subject to control and free to practice Judaism according to their own tastes. At a time when order and religious respectability were highly-esteemed Victorian values, the risk of “rampant sectarianism” and an “almost chaotic concourse of individualities” seemed particularly objectionable.<sup>81</sup> Even worse was the prospect of migrating Jews becoming estranged from the parent synagogues and neglecting their religious duties altogether – a real possibility as they no longer lived in districts where Jews concentrated. Indeed, editorialized the *JC*,

now that the members of the community [are] scattered in all directions, and consequently beyond the vivifying influence exercised upon religious life by close companionship springing from close contiguity of dwellings and synagogues and constant intentional and fortuitous intercommunion, the withdrawal of their stimulus would in all cases allow a cooling down of religious fervour, and where this did not exist before, of its gradual extinction. . . It is time therefore that that *laissez-faire* policy be given up.<sup>82</sup>

Creating an organization that regulated and united London synagogues would not merely ensure religious visibility and preserve Orthodox Judaism by curbing “the principle of doing as one pleases”<sup>83</sup>; it would also elevate London Jewry from a decentralizing community tackling local concerns to a unified religious minority whose leaders were in control at the local and national level. With these objectives in mind, the main Ashkenazi congregations of London amalgamated their finances and founded the United Synagogue, a centrally governed organization that would take a leading role in the building and

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<sup>81</sup> H., “Synagogal Union,” *JC*, no. 686 (February 7, 1868): 4-5; H., “Jewish Nationality and Union,” *JC*, no. 634 (February 8, 1867): 4-5; Nemo, “Jewish Congregational Union,” *JC*, no. 684 (January 24, 1868): 5.

<sup>82</sup> “Synagogue Accommodation,” *JC*, no. 349 (November 19, 1875): 544-545.

<sup>83</sup> Nemo, “The Road to Reconciliation,” *JC*, no. 77 (September 16, 1870): 8-9.

maintaining of prayer houses in London and that would apply a “statesmanlike policy to the synagogal question.”<sup>84</sup> Together with the consolidation of relief work and the creation of the chief rabbinate, the establishment of the US constituted an extraordinary effort. While in Germany, France, and Holland the impetus for centralization had come from above – the *Gemeinden* and *consistoires* were structures imposed by the state to control independent religious bodies – in Great Britain the movement toward organizational unification was initiated by the Jewish community itself.<sup>85</sup>

The US, presided over by Sir Anthony de Rothschild, had grand visions. It saw the initial alliance as a first step toward a more comprehensive union of Anglo-Jewish communities, “one of a nature eventually to embrace all synagogues, and, through them, to link all English Jews for purposes of internal improvement and external influence.”<sup>86</sup> As in a planetary system, the US would allow congregations to maintain a level of independence while they each orbited around a central core – the supreme authority of the chief rabbinate. In practice this meant that the US offered local groups loans to finance synagogue construction, financial support in times of difficulty, and “moral strength gained by unity”<sup>87</sup> in exchange for ownership of the premises and a high degree

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<sup>84</sup> “The Communal Revival,” *JC*, no. 234 (October 24, 1873): 497. The early 1870s was an era of transition, during which we move from local synagogues being erected by individual efforts to a realization that this is no longer desirable or attainable under present circumstances: “The matter at issue is no longer whether the needs of some hundred families in a particular quarter of the metropolis shall be supplied by one, two, or three synagogues; but whether the whole question of synagogue accommodation and clerical arrangements in the metropolis requires reconsideration . . . A broad comprehensive measure is needed – to use strong Saxon – to set things straight.” See “The Synagogue Question,” *JC*, no. 271 (June 5, 1874): 152-153.

<sup>85</sup> See Kadish, “Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture,” *Architectural History: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain* 45 (2002): 393.

<sup>86</sup> Indeed, explained the *Jewish Chronicle*, “our desire is to draw the whole fraternity of the Jews of the Empire, paulatim [little by little], into one fold – in which all shall bear the burdens and all enjoy the privileges of the British born Jew.”

<sup>87</sup> LMA: ACC/2712/01/001, “US council minutes” (July 1876). See also LMA: ACC/2712/01/069: “Building Committee Minute Book, 1871-1899” and ACC 2712.14.3d, “Bye-Laws.” In the latter, Lionel Louis Cohen, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, stated that the delegates “are convinced that union is strength, and that though each congregation can no more shine as a minor constellation, combined they

of control over the synagogue's location, size, design, and ritual. It was the US, for instance, that implemented the "two-mile radius,"<sup>88</sup> which determined where and how far apart London synagogues were to be built. Erecting one too close to another could destabilize membership and revenue, while placing them too far apart could encourage apathy. It therefore looked closely at population density and migration patterns to gauge if new synagogues would be sustainable. After all, the fashionability of neighborhoods changed and Jews might migrate elsewhere in the future, leaving recently built synagogues empty. Moreover, a congregation might have good intentions, but if it exhibited financial instability and a lack of growth, then a smart property investment on the part of the US might turn into a liability. To avoid a cluster of synagogues in one area and none in others, and to ensure financially strong institutions, the US carefully weighed demographic factors, a congregation's assets and religious commitment, and its proximity to other synagogues. When a congregation in Dalston, for example, applied for membership in the mid-1870s, its request was considered "somewhat premature" and denied. The executive committee of the US suggested that the Dalston community reapply "at a future time, when [its] prospects might be more defined, and [it can] show

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can and will diffuse light and warmth, in a degree formerly impossible, among the community." To Cohen and other US members, it was not responsible or respectable to be a disorganized religious community in a society that valued structure and hierarchy. They had a very optimistic vision of establishing an umbrella organization with the US at its head, with constituent synagogues spread all over London where seats were affordable and services were uniform. According to historian Aubrey Newman, this belief in patriarchal leadership grew out of the common assumptions that a close-knit Jewish elite shared about authority and status. People like Cohen, Asher, and de Rothschild, oftentimes related to each other by marriage, were accustomed to making decisions in family and business affairs without those decisions coming under close scrutiny of the majority. Their authority would be challenged in the following decades, when constituent members demanded the democratization of the US. See Newman, *The United Synagogue*, 47.

<sup>88</sup> LMA: ACC 2712-002-001, p. 135: "Proposed Enlargement of the Bayswater Synagogue. Report of the Commission of Enquiry" states: "Your commission therefore are of opinion that in selecting sites for synagogues on any general system, it is desirable that the synagogues should be placed about two miles apart, which would virtually be placing a synagogue about one mile from the residence of any member and would, in fact, be adopting the one-mile radius." Location was thus not so much determined by visibility as by population density. New buildings were to be situated as closely as possible to the largest number of residents and in practical relation to other synagogues.

more obviously the necessity for a permanent Synagogue.”<sup>89</sup> The US might have had a vision, but it also had a “thoroughly English aptitude for business.”<sup>90</sup>

Typically the US financed a third of the total cost of a building project by means of loans, on the condition that the congregation would owe no debt to anyone else by the time of completion, could ensure subscriptions, and would reimburse the US through membership fees. After their loans and interest were repaid in full, constituents would continue to contribute fees to help other congregations establish synagogues and to strengthen the religious life of the community as a whole. That these requirements were not always immediately clear is shown in the conversations between the US and the Borough Synagogue in the early 1870s. The latter was under the impression that the US would be responsible for its remaining debt in exchange for the Borough property.

According to one observer, the congregation had “rushed into the arms of the US with the ardour of an impassioned lover, ‘Only accept me, and we shall be for ever happy!’ Then came those ugly lawyers – red tape and blue bags and the difficult question of settlements,” which led to so much confusion over local liberties and communal

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<sup>89</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/01/002: “Dalston Synagogue,” October 30, 1881. The Dalston congregation reapplied for membership in October 1881 and the following month Lionel Cohen stated that this time “their congregation appears to possess the elements of stability and of increase . . . and affords evidence of strong religious attachment to their Synagogue.” In 1885 the Dalston congregation was formally admitted as the eleventh constituent synagogue. Between 1876 and 1885 the congregation convened in a “temporary synagogue” at Mildmay Road near Dalston Junction. The building, made of corrugated iron at a cost of some 500 pounds, was constructed within the space of five weeks and offered accommodation for about 200 worshippers. See “Dalston Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 391 (September 22, 1876): 389.

<sup>90</sup> “The Council of the United Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 96 (January 27, 1871): 8-9. This business-like attitude was not always appreciated, something that became particularly evident in the discussions over the closing of the Hambro Synagogue in the 1870s due to its decline in membership and growing debts. The council of the US, the “big guns at the West End,” was accused of having no heart, of exhibiting ruthless behavior. The Hambro synagogue, from their perspective, was only “a formidable stumbling block in the way of communal business.” Israel Zangwill gave credence to this view in his 1892 novel *Children of the Ghetto*, in which he referred to the US as “a joint-stock company” that focused primarily on making money. Twentieth-century scholars, too, have judged the policies of the US as being excessively harsh. Judy Glasman and Geoffrey Alderman, for instance, do not place the US in a particularly favorable light. Edward Jamilly, too, stated that “the US is ruled more by financial than spiritual considerations.” It may be argued, however, that a greater leniency on the part of the US and fewer requirements on the part of constituents would have made this institution much less successful.

obligations that some suggested “the members of the Borough Synagogue had better remain as they were” and should rescind their application.<sup>91</sup> However, after Lionel Cohen addressed the congregation to explain the US’s policies, and after “passion had time to cool,” the Borough Synagogue reapplied and became a constituent member the following year.

Aside from taking charge of monetary matters, the US implemented a design formula that would determine London’s synagogue landscape for the next hundred and forty years. As mentioned above, the US favored multiple district synagogues rather than a few monumental ones. “It would be unfair to crowd [synagogues] in one locality, while other districts are left unprovided for,” state the council minutes. They should therefore “be spread over as wide an area as possible, due regard being paid to the convenience of the great majority of the congregants. The object of your commission has been to devise means to encourage the attendance at synagogue of the greatest possible number of worshippers, not to consider the convenience of the smaller number.”<sup>92</sup> In order to afford this strategy, new buildings were generally not placed in prime locations (at major thoroughfares or squares) but in side-streets, where the cost of land was more affordable. They were moderate in size and relatively inexpensive in execution – building materials consisted primarily of brick and structures received little external ornamentation. “Much aesthetic beauty,” after all, “truly lies in the fitness of things” rather than in gaudy

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<sup>91</sup> “Borough Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 136 (November 3, 1871); no. 138 (November 17, 1871): 7; no. 140 (December 1, 1871): 7; no. 192 (November 29, 1872).

<sup>92</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/002/001: “Proposed Enlargement of the Bayswater Synagogue. Report of the Commission of Enquiry,” p. 135. The *JC* agreed with the US. “It is best not to expend thousands of pounds on one structure if it is expedient to distribute them over numerous structures,” stated an 1871 editorial. “We have occasionally heard the expression ‘a building worthy of its divine purpose.’ A building spacious enough, light enough and sufficiently ventilated; a building of decent solemnity; is all that is needful to be ‘worthy’ of such purpose. We do not – we cannot – believe that while the requirements of the provinces and the poorer districts of London are still pressing, it is wise or right to lavish money broadcast in one or two particular instances.” See “New Synagogues and Schools,” *JC*, no. 124 (August 11, 1871): 6-7.

display. This aesthetic pragmatism was applied to most constituent properties, especially to those serving small congregations. According to the executive committee of the proposed East London Synagogue (1873), the new building was “to be of the plainest character consistent with propriety” and was praised for being “by no means inelegant.”<sup>93</sup> The Hammersmith and West Kensington Synagogue, too, was to be “of an unpretentious but serviceable character.”

The interior followed an Orthodox floor plan, i.e., a central bimah, an ark on the eastern wall, male seats alongside two or three walls facing the bimah, and galleries for women. Modest reforms also permitted a more centrally-placed pulpit, a choir gallery, and a vestibule. Nathan Joseph, the architect-surveyor for the US, made sure these requirements were followed, as did the chief rabbi, who occasionally visited building sites. In 1877, for instance, the building committee of the East London Synagogue received a communiqué from the chief rabbi who, upon inspection of the premises, “call[ed] attention to the ladies’ gallery which he considered very low and not sufficiently screened.”<sup>94</sup> The committee, stated the minutes, were convened especially to reconsider the question of the galleries’ trellis work, after which plans were prepared that more closely adhered to Adler’s wishes.

The US, however, granted congregations substantial liberty with respect to the building’s interior design. As long as it adhered to Orthodox custom, the synagogue’s interior could be decorated according to the congregation’s own wishes and budget. In fact, the US paid greater attention to the building’s interior than to its exterior. “The great

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<sup>93</sup> LMA: 2712-002-001: “Report and Recommendations of the Executive Committee Concerning the Proposed East London Synagogue” (December 7, 1875), 289; “Consecration of the East London Synagogue,” *JC*, no 418 (March 30, 1877): 7.

<sup>94</sup> LMA: ACC 2712.ELS.001: East London Synagogue Minutes Book, “At a Meeting of the Committee held on Monday March 26th, 1877.”



essential is that the synagogue shall not be sombre or gloomy,”<sup>95</sup> which would dissuade members from attending services. An inviting space, on the other hand, would attract congregants and show them that Orthodoxy and bourgeois refinement were not incompatible. And, as Victorian cultural norms stipulated that architectural pretensions and ostentatious display were appropriate as long as they remained limited to the private sphere, elaborate decorative designs were deemed acceptable, even preferable. As a result, even constituent synagogues with sufficient funds appeared conservative externally, however rich they were in internal decoration, with stained-glass windows, marble pillars, intricate woodwork, heavily embroidered curtains, and colorful walls.

Often the US encouraged constituents to build a slightly larger building than was immediately required in the hope that it would attract more Jews to the area. According to Judy Glasman, this suggests that the US was guilty of “social and geographic engineering,” seeking to pull Jews out of the East End. While there may be some truth to this assessment as to north-east London, it seems an overstatement with respect to other districts. The US did not contribute funds to the building of a new place of worship unless there was already a significant Jewish population in the area. The US thus followed in the footsteps of migratory trends already in motion, rather than initiating them. That it proposed to erect a colossal synagogue in the heart of the Jewish quarter – the East End Scheme – only confirms that the US built synagogues wherever they were most needed, both to secure communal revenue and to prevent the weakening of religious observance among Anglo-Jewry. This does not mean that US policies had no influence on Jewish settlement; observant Jews were more likely to move into a neighborhood with rather than without a synagogue, and non-observant Jews oftentimes joined these

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<sup>95</sup> “Synagogue Details,” *JC*, no. 231 (August 29, 1873): 365.

enclaves for social reasons. US operations, then, adapted to rather than defined the prevailing demographic conditions.

As opposed to Amsterdam, where demographic dispersal was limited and Jewish leaders debated whether erecting a new synagogue was even necessary, in London the main question was not whether, but where and how to build. From the perspective of the chief rabbinate and the US, migrating and upwardly mobile Jews required synagogues and guiding them in their efforts by means of a central organization granted a great measure of control. Moreover, building respectable synagogues in the right places would not only keep London Jewry Jewish; it would also enhance the public representation of Anglo-Jewry as a dignified religious minority. After all, it was “not wise to disregard the opinion of fellow-citizens of denominations other than our own . . . whose esteem it is proper to seek.”<sup>96</sup>

The Central Synagogue symbolized these efforts (fig. 10). Designed by Nathan S. Joseph and inaugurated the same year as the US (1870), it announced the new era of Jewish centralization. According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, this “chaste Moresque” building, in which the US would hold its monthly meetings, represented a historical moment in which the Anglo-Jewish community as a whole was “passing from old days into new days.”<sup>97</sup> The creation and design of both the Central Synagogue and the US were repeatedly discussed in relation to each other and became deliberately fused. This alliance, stated a euphoric editorial in the newspaper,

is more than an event: it is an augury. We look on it as an era of emancipation from old trammels and local jealousies, and as a harbinger of Union, which may, we hope, be sufficiently comprehensive to embrace within its folds *every* English congregation . . . it certainly is a felicitous coincidence, that in the same year in which a centre ground of Union has been marked out by this Alliance, the “Central” Synagogue was opened. This majestic building . . . is not only a

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<sup>96</sup> “The New Central Branch Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 42 (January 14, 1870): 7.

<sup>97</sup> “The Old House and the New House,” *JC*, no. 54 (April 8, 1870): 8.

stately addition to the Palladian architecture of the metropolis, but an embodiment of the Union which is a sign of vitality and progress which is secured by conservatism.<sup>98</sup>

By associating the inauguration of the Central Synagogue with the foundation of the US, the building itself became more than a synagogue; it became “a nucleus, so to speak, whence the various component elements of the new alliance will radiate. Such a synagogue is not *local*; it is metropolitan; it is in every sense *communal*.”<sup>99</sup> The synagogue’s collective character, its loyalty to Orthodoxy, its respectable appearance, and its very location in the heart of the metropolis, were attributes that the US hoped to claim for itself. And it could do so after the chief rabbi directly linked the two by referring to the Central Synagogue as “this United House of prayer” in his inaugural address.<sup>100</sup> The US would tighten this bond even further by hiring its designer, Nathan Joseph, as the architect-surveyor for future building projects.

The Central Synagogue was situated at 133-141 Great Portland Street, just down the road from the congregation’s previous location, in the West End. This area had long been favoured by the well-to-do as a place of residence because it was usually upwind of the smoke drifting from the crowded City of London. With its expensive town houses, fashionable shops, and theaters it was an attractive and respectable place for upper-middle class Jews to live and build a new house of worship. At a cost of £37,284, the Central Synagogue seated close to 900 worshippers. Almost half of these seats were

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<sup>98</sup> “Retrospect of the Year,” *JC*, no. 78 (September 23, 1870): 8-9.

<sup>99</sup> “The New Central Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 51 (March 18, 1870): 8. A term that surfaced quite regularly in relation to the US’s vision was “shoolism,” which referred to the tendency for each local community to act without reference to the others. The US wished to induce members to look beyond their own narrow boundaries and immediate desires, and to focus instead on the long-term interests of the community as a whole. Of course, what precisely these interests were was determined by the Jewish elite who managed the United Synagogue. The tension between this vision of centralization and local “shoolism” would surface repeatedly during the high-Victorian period.

<sup>100</sup> Adler had composed a Hebrew ode to the Central Synagogue, which was sung during its inauguration: “O Lord our God! Thy tender mercies show/To all in *this ‘United’ House of prayer*; On rich and poor Thy sacred love bestow/And shield Thy children with a Father’s care!” See “Consecration of the New Central Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 54 (April 8, 1870): 10.

reserved for females, an indication of how common it had become for women to accompany their husbands to Shabbat services or to visit the synagogue by themselves. Modeled after a Romanesque basilica with a four-story tower flanking the street façade, but with Moorish arches on the upper floor windows and occasional Gothic ornamentation, the Central Synagogue was a typical Victorian building: eclectic – Krinsky referred to it as “confused” – restrained, dignified but unspectacular on the outside, and lavish on the inside. Its principal entrance, framed by a horse-shoe arched portal, directly faced the street. Joseph had expressed concern over the level of noise coming from traffic, intensified by the lateral position of the synagogue to the thoroughfare. Opening the windows during summer could prove disruptive, which led Joseph to suggest an alternative entrance facing Charlotte Street. The building committee, however, was not willing to “sacrifice the advantage of having the more imposing frontage to the main street, in order to secure more complete quiet,” and decided “no change [was to] be made on the original planning of placing the principle frontage in Portland Street.”<sup>101</sup> We have to remember that London Jews built conservatively because it reflected propriety and aptitude, but that did not mean the result had to be inconspicuous. In fact, their synagogue was to be admired precisely because of these qualities.

As for the interior, the main prayer room contained benches in a longitudinal direction facing the central bimah, women’s galleries alongside the northern and southern walls, the ark placed in a highly ornate alcove lit by a leaded window, and a three-apsed, rib-vaulted ceiling. Joseph applied Islamic motifs in the horseshoe-arched arcades of the

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<sup>101</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/CRS/001: “Report of the Building and Finance Committees, Submitted to the Vestry of the Great Synagogue 2nd February, 5628-1868,” p. 31.

galleries and the interior walls of the eastern alcove. As in the Alhambra, explains Hannelore Künzl, the alcove is framed by two pairs of columns, a theme that is repeated above the Torah curtain.<sup>102</sup> The two tablets are placed in the center of the apse, visually crowning the speaker standing in the pulpit placed in front of it. The interior design, however, also featured Gothic elements, as in the vault and the tracery of the windows. And, to improve decorum, Joseph included three-foot-wide gangways on either side of the main hall, “which allow[ed] persons to pass to or from their seats during service, without disturbing the congregation.” Dignity, after all, was a guiding principle for the exterior as well as the interior of the building.

Even though the congregation of the Central Synagogue was large and relatively wealthy, its building committee applied the same philosophy toward synagogue architecture as the US would with regard to smaller constituent congregations – not surprising given that Anthony de Rothschild, Lionel L. Cohen and others were members of both bodies. The synagogue might have been larger, but its principles were conventional: a restrained but dignified exterior expression, a primary focus on the interior, brick material, and an Orthodox floor plan. To guarantee a satisfactory implementation of this formula, the building committee had opted to appoint a Jewish architect rather than to organize a public design competition – a practice that had become quite common in London and in Europe more generally. It had done so, confessed the committee, because competition often invited “showy designs” or “draughtsman

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<sup>102</sup> According to the German art historian Hannelore Künzl the eastern alcove is built in the Spanish-Islamic style of the fourteenth century. For more on Islamic patterns in synagogue architecture, see Künzl’s *Islamische Stilelemente im Synagogenbaue des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lange, 1984); Ivan Davidson Kalmar, “Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7: 3 (2001): 68-100; Kalmar and David J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005).

exercises,” which “aim at the attractive rather than the useful, [which] concentrate their strength on the decorative portions of the building, and neglect the far more important points of construction skill and adaptation.” It was safer to appoint a Jewish architect who would “prepare designs for a building conforming to specified requirements.”<sup>103</sup> At the inauguration of the building, Joseph was thus praised for his “intelligent comprehension of *aptitude*” precisely because he successfully visualized in mortar and brick how the community wished to be seen. Joseph had designed “a pure chaste Moresque [building], free from meretricious decorations . . . of which we may be proud; a synagogue which, without being gaudy and theatrical, without being overloaded with ornament or meretricious decorations, we may show with permissible and pious pride to our fellow-citizens. [It is] a structure worthy of our more refined age, our more recognised social and political position, and our greatly increased number.”<sup>104</sup> The Central Synagogue, the fifth constituent of the US, had become a successful model for future building projects, to be reproduced either on a small scale for congregations in Dalston or on a larger scale for the more prosperous communities in St. John’s Wood and the West End.

The US was remarkably successful in establishing synagogues based on these principles in a variety of London neighborhoods. By 1903 it included fifteen constituent synagogues, eight of which it had partially funded. On the basis of these numbers one may think its involvement in synagogue affairs was welcomed and that relations between the US and its members were convivial or uncomplicated. One may also be tempted to conclude that the US’s policies preserved Orthodoxy among the local population and warded off the forces of secularization. We should, however, be very judicious with these

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<sup>103</sup> LMA: ACC 2712.CRS.001 : “Central Synagogue. Minutes of Subcommittee, 1866-1871,” p. 20-22.

<sup>104</sup> “The New Central Branch Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 42 (January 14, 1870): 7.

conclusions. The primary incentive for Orthodox Judaism in London at this time should be attributed to the large numbers of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, not to the prolific building plans of the US. While not all of these immigrants were observant, and while many over time followed a similar trajectory toward acculturation and secularization, they did inject the Anglo-Jewish community with a new contingent of Orthodox members. Moreover, for many Jews, the vision of the US – Anglicization, public modesty, communal centralization – was not a primary concern and they deliberately resisted its propositions. This is evident among the immigrant contingent in the East London, who was largely disinterested in the US’s East End Scheme (discussed below). The lack of public support ultimately forced the US to give up its ambitious plans. Prosperous West End Jews, too, had a mind of their own, exhibiting a preference for local rather than communal interests. Many resented the tactics and growing power of the US, and accused it of “empire building.” Too business-like in its attitude, it was charged with privileging money-matters over religious concerns. Moreover, it was blamed for being mute to the voice of the average London Jew who had concrete needs, showing instead an obsession with abstract ideas and its own success. “Local colour,” in the words of one contemporary, remained a strong force.

### **The Battle of Bayswater**

That the US encountered public resistance from its constituent members became obvious in a drawn-out conflict over the expansion plans of the Bayswater Synagogue. In January 1872, during a meeting of seat-holders, the question arose whether to enlarge the existing building, either by extending the main walls but leaving the overall structure intact, or by tearing it down and building a new edifice in the same location. Space had

become increasingly tight for the congregation as growing numbers of well-to-do Jews drifted westward and settled in the area. The Bayswater district, which borders the north of Hyde Park near Kensington Gardens, was a fast-growing residential suburb in West London known for its wide streets, garden squares, and fashionable mansions. The existing synagogue, located at the west corner of Chichester Place and Harrow Road on the northern edge of the Bayswater neighborhood, was bursting at the seams. Its accommodation had already been expanded to 340 male and 333 female seats in 1865, but all of these were let and the number of worshippers on the waiting list was growing.<sup>105</sup> Having to deny observant Jews membership was not only an embarrassment; it also meant a loss of communal income. Enlarging the synagogue therefore seemed a logical solution. Moreover, crowded conditions had led to complaints from members, who compared the Shabbat service to “labouring under a hideous nightmare, occasioned by dearth of pure air . . . as if being cooked in a Turkish bath.”<sup>106</sup> Sensitive to these problems, a meeting was called by the executive committee, who proposed to enlarge the existing structure.

A considerable number of speakers, however, voiced their discontent. Rather than spending funds on expansion, some argued, it would be wiser to build another synagogue in another neighborhood. They “did not think it judicious to centralise public worship.” It would be unseemly for the Bayswater congregation, as a constituent member, to disregard the US vision of self-sustaining district synagogues throughout London. Others

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<sup>105</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/002/001: “Proposed Enlargement of the BS. Report of the Commission of Enquiry,” p. 133: Within two years from the time of the erection of the synagogue, the demand for seats being greater than the supply then obtainable, an additional gallery was erected, and in the body of the synagogue 44 additional seats were obtained by narrowing the space between the benches, and diminishing the gangways on each side of the reading desk, also as to place an extra row of seats on each side of the building.

<sup>106</sup> Chaim, “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 149 (February 2, 1872): 4.



approached the issue from an aesthetic point of view. H. H. Collins, an architect by profession, called the proposal an act of “absolute vandalism” that would “seriously interfere with the acoustical properties of the building” and “spoil its chaste and beautiful design.” According to Collins the Bayswater Synagogue, built in a Venetian Italian design, had “created the Jewish character of the neighbourhood” and should be left alone. His comments were seconded by A. H. Moses, who added that the committee “was concerned rather with the aggrandisement of the Bayswater Synagogue than with the general good of the community.”<sup>107</sup> Taken aback by the intensity of these remarks, the executive committee decided to drop the matter for the time being.

The discussion was resumed a year later, when the Bayswater committee again proposed to enlarge the building. It had asked N. S. Joseph as well as the architects Tress & Innes to each prepare a proposal and an approximate estimate. Joseph submitted a plan that preserved as much as possible the existing structure by moving the walls outward. Purposefully simple and affordable – “if the sum were greatly exceeded, it would have been wiser and more economical to pull down and rebuild the whole structure” – the project would not exceed 6,000 pounds. Tress & Innes’ proposal, however, promised more invasive alterations at a more economical price. While their estimate did not include the cost of redecorating the interior, the project could be completed for 4,000 pounds.

Due to its constituent status, the Bayswater committee was obligated to inform the United Synagogue of its plans. The latter promptly appointed a commission of enquiry to investigate the matter. The commission, which included among others Algernon E.

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<sup>107</sup> The *JC* published detailed proceedings of board meetings, including those of the Board of Guardians, the United Synagogue Council, and its constituent members. See, among others, A Member of the Bayswater Synagogue, “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 148 (January 26, 1872): 4; in the same edition, “Bayswater Synagogue,” 10-11.

Sydney, N. Davis, and Lionel L. Cohen, hired the former president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Prof. L. Donaldson, to examine the two proposals as well as the various concerns over the effects of enlargement. Again objections had been heard from seat-holders: the building would be a dangerous structure when altered; its proportions would be marred; the acoustic properties would be injured. Donaldson, however, concluded that these concerns were unwarranted and that – much to the chagrin of Joseph, the primary architect of the US! – the design of Tress & Innes was preferable, despite its more realistic cost of 9,000 pounds. The US, satisfied with his judgment, proposed to contribute half of the expense to the Bayswater congregation, who would repay the loan over the course of ten years.

In the meantime, seat-holders continued bickering over the architectural plans, which were exhibited in the council room of the Bayswater Synagogue. The banker Samuel Montagu (1832-1911), for instance, complained that enlargement would “kill the movement for a new synagogue” and would create a monopoly in Bayswater. Montagu, the future architect of the Federation of Minor Synagogues, foresaw the clustering of Jews around one monumental building that would deny easy access to co-religionists living elsewhere. Moreover, it would deprive other congregations of resources (such as new residents with assets) and diminish their chances of meeting requirements for membership in the US. The Bayswater initiative therefore went directly against the aims of the US. Collins, equally hostile to the proposal but for different reasons, expressed his frustration over the US’s choice of architect (Tress & Innes), which he believed should have been a Jew. “All things being equal,” he maintained, “it was the duty of Jews to encourage those of their own community.” He regretted “that the sub-committee had not

found in the plans prepared by a Jewish architect that value which they undoubtedly possessed.”<sup>108</sup> That the Victorian virtues of self-restraint and decorum were temporarily forgotten in the discussion of the matter is clear from a rebuke that appeared in the *Chronicle* the following week. The conduct of the meeting, wrote an embarrassed contributor,

was disorderly and undignified in the extreme. [Many ignored] the fact that the day was a day of rest to the great majority of their fellow-townsmen, [and] made the morning hideous with sounds which I am informed were distinctly audible in the church adjoining as well as all over the immediate neighbourhood; while four policemen were at one time looking through the glass doors to see whether their services would be required. We were doing our best to qualify ourselves for the objectionable epithet once applied to us by Mr. Edmund Yates in his “Tame Cats” – of “Howling Hebrews.” Gentlemen who rose to speak, with the best possible intentions, were hissed, laughed at, hooted and generally made to feel thoroughly uncomfortable. In fact a debate in the French Chamber, which is about the liveliest conversation I have ever listened to, was calmness itself compared with the debate on the question of the Enlargement of the Bayswater Synagogue.<sup>109</sup>

The controversy took on a new intensity when the estimates made by Tress & Innes, Donaldson, and the US commission of enquiry proved to be much too low. Upon further investigation, it was found, the project would cost £12,369, exclusive of the architect’s commission, an extraordinary amount for alterations that would only fractionally increase the number of seats. Under these circumstances, the scheme of enlargement was ultimately abandoned. “The enlargement bubble has burst at last,” scorned “a voice from Bayswater” in 1874, who dramatically claimed that two additional synagogues could have been built had it not been for this loss of valuable time and money.<sup>110</sup> He pointed fingers not merely at the building committee, but also at the US, which had been so preoccupied with the Bayswater question that it had neglected the needs of Jews living in Notting Hill and St. John’s Wood.

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<sup>108</sup> For an account of the proceedings see “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 200 (January 24, 1873): 606-7.

<sup>109</sup> T., “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 202 (February 7, 1873): 631-632.

<sup>110</sup> A Voice from Bayswater, “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 270 (May 29, 1874): 132.

As a result of these “blunders” two distinct parties came into being – one that advocated the rebuilding of a large synagogue on the same location and another that favored the retention of the present structure and the establishment of additional, moderate-sized synagogues in neighboring districts. The former expressed itself clearly in local terms, whereas the latter committed to the US’s vision of communal district synagogues controlled by a centralized authority. When in November 1875 the Bayswater Committee proposed “pulling down the existing building and the erection of a larger one on its site,” a plan that would best serve the immediate needs of the local congregation, the opposing party, who “criticised in severe terms the action of those who had put forward the plans,” declared it “absurd in inception” and “injudicious in execution.”<sup>111</sup> The US would never agree to such an “unwise expenditure of a vast sum, which would be better utilised in the erection of additional synagogues in this district.” Algernon E. Sydney, who was a member of the Bayswater congregation but also served on the US’s commission of enquiry, wryly reminded the audience that the existing building “was the property, not of the members of the Bayswater Synagogue, but of the US.” By reiterating that the congregation had no legal power to initiate anything, he alluded to the futility of their efforts to initiate a rebuilding project. The two contending parties ended in such a deadlock that to one observer it seemed as if the very constitution of the US was on trial.<sup>112</sup>

The debate spilled over into the public sphere. The editors of the *Jewish Chronicle*, who championed the pragmatism of the US, ascribed the ambitions of some Bayswater members to man’s natural urge to “promote the welfare of his [own] parish,

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<sup>111</sup> “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 347 (November 19, 1875): 546-547.

<sup>112</sup> “The Battles of the Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 217 (May 23, 1873): 133.

which has a special hold on his affection, and in which all his immediate interests are centred, at the cost of the larger area, the attachment to which is . . . much more abstract than that to the narrower circle.”<sup>113</sup> Human nature thus accounted for their emotional – or selfish – behavior. Nemo, whose sarcastic contributions to the newspaper were infamous, agreed and admitted that man’s emotional nature was affected in the highest degree by extravagant buildings. “Vastness,” after all, was “one, and no mean, element of the sublime” and exercised a powerful influence on man’s responsive spirit of veneration. Most people, Jews as well as gentiles, were drawn to “the incense, the glitter, the upholstery, the sing-song.” He himself “like[d] to see synagogues gorgeous and grand” rather than cribbed and confined, just as he preferred “modesty and severe simplicity in the drawing room – that is, if [he] had one.” However, he added, if men only exercised their reason and listened to popular opinion, they could not help but conclude that it better suited the London community to “have small and simple and unpretentious structures.”<sup>114</sup> Common sense, in other words, rendered glitter and grandeur unjustifiable.

The battle over Bayswater gave rise to more than newspaper correspondence. The London School of Jewish Studies Library owns an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Another “Battle of Talking”: A Sketch with a Moral*, which described the affair in terms of two rival families: the Bayswater Goodenoughs and the Portland Swellingtons. The former family, so the story goes, was increasing in number as some brothers and sisters, “attracted by the salubrity of the locality, expressed a wish to reside in the neighborhood.” Seduced by the magnificent property of the Swellingtons (most likely the Central Synagogue), the Bayswater Goodenoughs initiated a plan to enlarge their hitherto

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<sup>113</sup> “The United Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 362 (March 3, 1876): 784-785.

<sup>114</sup> Nemo, “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 151 (February 16, 1872): 6-7.

convenient house. As the family enjoyed good relations with an influential banking establishment by the name of United Company, Limited (the US), it expected no problems. A family feud erupted, however, when dissident family members protested against the projected scheme, “which they denounced as extravagant and as in all respects undesirable.” It all came to a climax at a Board of Directors meeting of the United Company, where the dissidents’ arguments were ultimately deemed more prudent. It was, after all, better “to restrain the aspirations of ambition and the desire to emulate the grandeur of others, and to promote the more moderate delights of contentment with one’s own sufficiently good fortunes.”

Of course the real issue here concerns public representation. A portion of the Bayswater community was not averse to displaying publicly its prosperity and dedication to the Jewish faith – even if this expressed itself in size rather than in architectural audaciousness – and they resented the fact that the US was prohibiting them from doing so. Since the Jewish population in Bayswater continued to grow, replacing the existing building with a grand edifice seemed a logical step – even more so as the US already owned the site. Bourgeois Jews on the continent were constructing magnificent synagogues; why could they not do the same? The US, however, took a different approach to the synagogue question. It no longer considered monumental prayer houses a viable option in view of London Jewry’s demographic behavior. From a financial perspective it was more prudent to support modest-scale projects. More importantly, it began to think on a communal level, resisting the ambitious individualism of congregations and advocating instead the religious health of London Jewry as a whole. “Just because the Bayswater congregation is rich” did not mean “it ought to have such a

grand synagogue as the one in Berlin.”<sup>115</sup> While the Oranienburgerstraße Synagogue, which held over 3,200 worshippers, in the Prussian capital was admirable, in London such an edifice would most likely produce the very opposite of what the US was trying to achieve: many empty seats, financial dependency, and greater indifference among Jewish residents not in walking-distance from the synagogue. Decentralized places of worship, on the other hand, would meet the demands of a decentralized Jewish population and ensure communal revenue. Besides, it was far more respectable to be a Goodenough than a Swellington.

The battle of Bayswater would continue for the next few years. By 1876 some people complained that the subject was becoming tiresome and pleaded for an end to the deadlock. The “contest between building comparatively large centralised synagogues or small decentralised places of worship,”<sup>116</sup> stated the *Jewish Chronicle*, was finally decided when the US approved the building of the New West End Synagogue at St. Petersburg Place, which relieved the pressure on Bayswater. This “plain and dignified building” in a predominantly Graeco-Byzantine design was thus the direct outcome of the expansion battle. The New West End project was initially a private undertaking supported by the secessionist group from Bayswater, who remained adamant in erecting a prominent synagogue. The West End congregation, however, soon sought membership in the US “to prevent the creation of divergent interests, and in order to work in harmony with the Bayswater Synagogue” – a coded appeal for financial contributions and a desire for congregational stability. A compromise was thus reached by building a relatively

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<sup>115</sup> An Echo from Bayswater, “Proposed Enlargement of the Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 199 (January 17, 1873). That the Bayswater Jews were more focused on the local aspect also becomes clear when they show their disinterest in supporting synagogues in the East End, particularly the East End Scheme.

<sup>116</sup> “Bayswater Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 348 (November 26, 1875): 556.

large edifice beyond the two-mile radius – it was located just over two miles away from the Bayswater synagogue, near Kensington Gardens, in an area increasingly populated by bourgeois Jews – and by leaving the original Bayswater building intact. The US would obtain ownership of the property, and the congregation would fall under the ecclesiastical authority of the chief rabbi. Moreover, both parties agreed that the new structure would remain faithful to US practices and Victorian tastes by “avoid[ing Jewish] symbolism of any description” and by applying “severe conventionalism”<sup>117</sup> in ornamentation, confirming that prominent West End Jews preferred to express their status in terms of size and interior splendor, rather than in architectural distinctiveness. Indeed, reported *The Builder*, the building committee had selected an architect whose primary objective was to produce “a pleasing [exterior] composition, with enough of the Eastern feeling to render it suggestive, and enough of the Western severity to make it appropriate for a street building in an English town.”<sup>118</sup> Dignified but restrained, more Jewish on the inside than on the outside, London Jewry had again produced a typical Victorian synagogue.

Of importance here is not whether the Bayswater dissidents ultimately won or lost; the point is that they publicly resisted the centralizing forces of the Jewish establishment and the authority of the US, creating conflict in a community that has oftentimes been depicted as undramatic. The battle of Bayswater suggests that synagogue building in London, contrary to the architectural reticence of the actual structures, was a contentious issue.

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<sup>117</sup> “The New West End Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 522 (March 28, 1879):12.

<sup>118</sup> George Audsley, who had designed the Liverpool Synagogue only a few years earlier, was apparently no fan of the Moorish style and deliberately avoided it in the New West End building. He found it “both unsuggestive and inappropriate for a Jewish place of worship” and envisioned instead “a blend of Eastern and Western Schools of Art,” adopting such elements as a rose window and Gothic-inspired silhouettes. For a more detailed description of the building, see *The Builder* (September 12, 1874): 773.



## East London

The profile of London Jewry altered dramatically in the 1880s and 1890s with the influx of East European and Russian immigrants, which brought the community as a whole more on a par with that of Amsterdam. The Jewish upper and middle-classes became once again a minority, and their sense of optimism was dampened by new realities: a large and growing contingent of poor aliens, increased visibility, an emerging national discourse on immigration reform, a weakening of Britain's economic position on the world market and consequently a strengthening of concerns over unemployment, low wages, affordable housing, and public spending. The tens of thousand of Jewish immigrants who settled in the East End – roughly two square miles centered in Whitechapel and St. George's<sup>119</sup> – thus rendered the established community increasingly nervous. The former undid all that the acculturated natives had worked so hard to dispose of, namely their physical distinctiveness, residential concentration, accent, and “uncultured” disposition. Indeed, the immigrant population created once again a self-contained milieu that encompassed crammed quarters, hevrot, coffee-houses, theaters, billiard rooms, and open markets. While bourgeois norms advocated privacy and decorum, East European immigrants reinvigorated street life, including outdoor celebrations of Simhat Torah and Purim. While bourgeois respectability encouraged aesthetic reforms in synagogue services, such as the introduction of a boys' choir and sermons, East End hevrot ignored such “Christian” requirements and practiced Judaism according to old world customs. The immigrant community, in other words, defied

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<sup>119</sup> Gartner, 146. Geoffrey Alderman calculates that London Jewry expanded to approximately 135,000 between 1881 and 1900 – an annual rate of growth of 10 per cent. Roughly 120,000 Jews were living in the East End by 1899. See Alderman, 118.

popular residential developments and ongoing Jewish integration by reviving a multi-purpose and voluntary Jewish ghetto.<sup>120</sup>

The historian Lloyd Gartner, who estimated some 100,000 Jewish immigrants arrived in England between 1870 and 1902, found himself “struck by [the community’s] self-centredness, its utter autonomy from the rest of the population.”<sup>121</sup> Residential clustering (fig. 12), an inward-looking quality, and a less sharply defined boundary between public or private space set the immigrant community visibly apart from the mainstream. The East End, once a socio-economically mixed area, became one of the most densely populated and run-down districts in the city due to a combination of immigration fever and the razing of thousands of homes to make room for railways and wide thoroughfares. Whitechapel, for instance, counted 8,264 dwellings and 75,552 residents in 1871, an average of 9.14 people per house; thirty years later its population had grown to 78,768 while the number of homes had decreased to 5,735, or 13.74 residents per house. The average density in this area, assessed Gartner, rose from 286 to 600 inhabitants per acre in a relatively short time. That these inhabitants were overwhelmingly Jewish only emphasized the “alien” quality of the neighborhood.

These streets, with their Yiddish store signs, curious sounds, and their long-bearded male residents, exuded an air of foreignness which, together with London’s residential homogenization and social segregation, posited the East End as the direct

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<sup>120</sup> On the growing urban visibility of Jews in the nineteenth century see Richard I. Cohen, “Urban Visibility and Biblical Visions: Jewish Culture in Western and Central Europe in the Modern Age,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. by David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 730-796. Stephen Sharot also argued that native Jews expressed alarm at the visibility of a foreign Jewish culture. In 1873, the consecration of a Sefer Torah in the East End was attended by what the *Chronicle* called “the undignified and highly objectionable accompaniment of a public procession of Jewish ceremonial through London streets on the Sabbath of millions of our fellow-countrymen.” Sharot, “Native Jewry,” 42.

<sup>121</sup> Gartner, 186. See also *The Home and the Synagogue of the Modern Jew; Sketches of Modern Jewish Life and Ceremonies* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1871).

opposite of West London suburbs. No longer were there high-end and rundown streets within socio-economically mixed neighborhoods; in the high Victorian period districts as a whole became classified as fashionable or disreputable. Consequently, the East End became the antithesis to everything civilized London stood for; it was dense, clannish, diseased, immoral, home to socialist revolutionaries and anarchists, and therefore a threat to the native Jews' reputation and civil status. The Jack the Ripper murders in the late 1880s, which occurred in and around the East End, only affirmed the dark savagery of this neighborhood – a popular theme in such books as *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, *The People of the Abyss*, *Ragged London*, and *The Nether World*.<sup>122</sup>

The influx of immigrants raised concerns over an issue that native Jews believed was nonexistent in England, namely the Jewish Question. “The large immigration of foreign Jews in 1882 has caused the Jewish question in East London to become more and more acute,” stated an editorial in the *Jewish Chronicle*, “and has introduced a feature into Jewish East End life which before that time was almost entirely absent.”<sup>123</sup> Initially limited in scope – the Jewish question was the East London question only – it soon encompassed the fate of both Jewish natives and aliens. The established community, informed about the socio-political conditions of Jews on the continent and sensitive to British public opinion, realized that to gentiles the differences between Anglo-Jewish gentlemen and poor immigrants were not as apparent. Stereotypes by their very nature

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<sup>122</sup> In *London: The Biography*, Peter Ackroyd concurs that the popular image of the East End as “the ‘abyss’ or ‘the nether world’ of strange secrets and desires intensified. It was the area of London into which more poor people were crammed than any other, and out of that congregation of poverty sprang reports of evil and immorality, of savagery and unnamed vice. . . All the anxieties about the city in general became attached to the East End in particular, as if in some peculiar sense it had become a microcosm of London’s own dark life.” See *London: The Biography* (New York: Nan E. Talese, 2000): 664.

<sup>123</sup> “Proposed Foundation of a Large Synagogue and Provident Society in East London,” *JC*, no. 1084 (January 3, 1890): 7-8. See also LMA: ACC 2712/01/002: “Scheme for the Foundation of a Synagogue and Provident Society in East London: Report of the Executive Committee on the Following Reference of Council of January 22nd, 1889.”

generalize and classify, leaving little room for nuance. “Our fair fame is bound up with theirs,” warned the editorial, “the outside world is not capable of making minute discrimination between Jew and Jew, and forms the opinions of Jews in general as much, if not more, from them than from the Anglicised position of the community.”<sup>124</sup> As a result, London Jewry took active measures to accelerate the acculturation process, measures which grew out of an honest concern over the well-being of poor Jews and the widespread unease over the potential consequences of their presence.

One source of discontent and a prime candidate for Anglicization was the *hevra*. As opposed to Amsterdam, where small and independent synagogues were primarily established by native Jews, in London most *hevrot* were maintained by immigrants. They shared similar motivations: membership fees to community synagogues were too high, the location and hours of services were more convenient, and people oftentimes enjoyed the intimacy and independence that a small congregation offered. Most immigrants felt comfortable in *hevrot*; the interior, the service, people’s appearance and behavior resembled those of Eastern Europe and Russia. US synagogues, the majority of which were being built in western districts away from where most immigrants lived, appeared foreign. Moreover, *hevrot* provided modest financial payments in times of need, including *shiva* benefits during the period of seven days of confined mourning following the death of a family member, during which no work could be performed. Also, in both cities *hevrot* were small in size and predominantly located in residential homes, converted chapels, rented rooms, shops, or back-yards. In London, however, these institutions were much more contentious, in part because their members did not recognize the Chief Rabbinate and openly accused the native Jewish establishment of practicing

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<sup>124</sup> *JC* (August 12, 1881)

inauthentic Judaism, and because they obstructed the Anglicization process. Many hevra synagogues, in other words, did not fall in line with the larger movement toward centralization and consolidation.<sup>125</sup>

We do need to make a distinction between the minor synagogues that had been part of the London landscape since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and the newly established hevrot founded by East European immigrants in the 1880s and 1890s. The former, such as *Mahazike Torah* (“Upholders of the Law” or the Rosemary Lane congregation, 1748), the Polish Synagogue in Cutler Street (1790), and the little Scarborough Street hevra in Gun Yard (1792) had been exposed to the forces of British culture over the course of the nineteenth century and their members were Anglicized. The same counts for the Sandy’s Row (1851), Fashion Street (1858), and German Synagogues (in Old Broad Street, 1858), whose members came from Holland and Germany and whose religious outlook and patterns of behavior differed little from that of English Jews. While these independent congregations constituted a thorn in the eyes of the United Synagogue, they were not seen as a threat due to their potential for unification with the newly established US. After all, preached the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1876, “the tendency of union manifests itself far and wide by the centripetal forces everywhere at work among homogeneous masses” and “synagogues will not be able to resist the tendency of the age. Why, uselessly, withstand this profound and just aspiration?”<sup>126</sup> Unification seemed almost an inevitability and the minor synagogues of London would eventually fall into place. Hevrot founded by East European immigrants in the post-1881 period, it was

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<sup>125</sup> The hostility and scorn expressed by immigrants towards Anglo-Jewish establishment was intensified by the arrival of rabbinical scholars of high repute. Trained in the *yeshivot* of Poland, Lithuania, and Russia, these rabbis were regarded as legitimate and competent religious authorities – the very opposite of people like Nathan Marcus and Hermann Adler, who had “succumbed” to Christian pressures.

<sup>126</sup> “Our Mission,” *JC*, no. 369 (April 21, 1876): 40.

feared, would not and consequently triggered a different response, in part because of their proliferation and radically different attitude toward the native Jewish community, and in part because of the changed political environment in which they emerged.<sup>127</sup>

Still, the relationship between Jewish officials and established hevrot remained tense. A public controversy, for instance, erupted over the Sandy's Row synagogue in the 1870s involving the US, the Chief Rabbi, and the Jewish public at large (fig. 13). The matter revolved around the hevra's appeal for financial contributions to support its reconstruction efforts. The *Chevrat Menahem Avelim Chesed Ve'Emeth* (Society for Comforting Mourners and Burying the Dead) had leased its premises – a converted French chapel in Artillery Lane, Bishopsgate – since 1867. It could afford to rent the building for a nominal sum as the cellars were sublet as storage space to a neighboring warehouse owner, who had a separate entrance. After the lease expired, the congregation opted to renew the contract for another twenty-one years, which was approved by the landlord on the condition that the building was thoroughly repaired, at a cost of some 700 pounds. Due to insufficient funds, the 500 lower-middle class members of the hevra requested public support, after which “much controversy ensued as to the policy of encouraging these Hebras.”<sup>128</sup> Lionel L. Cohen, one of the founders of the United

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<sup>127</sup> The Jewish public was at first antagonistic towards East European hevrot; they were seen as dangerous elements in the community and obstacles to Anglicization. One reader, who compared the Polish hevra in Goulstone Street, Whitechapel, to a dancing saloon, fumed that their “English sense of propriety [was] outraged by this strange admixture of things sacred with things profane,” which would bring scandal upon the community.” In the 1890s, however, readers became more tolerant of these separatist institutions, in part because they rather saw immigrants attend services than succumb to the socialist cause, and in part because they recognized hevrot served legitimate needs for the vast number of Jews in the East End. While “the chevra system. . . has its drawbacks,” wrote one observer, “its advantages must none the less be conceded.” Taking them by the hand rather than by the throat would ultimately lead to better results. See, among others, “An Heroic Scheme,” *JC*, no. 1085 (January 10, 1890): 11; A Resident of Whitechapel, “Our Hebras,” *JC*, no. 400 (November 24, 1876): 533; M.D., “Our Chebras,” *JC*, no. 383 (July 28, 1876): 259; A., “The Hebras,” *JC*, no. 381 (July 14, 1876): 228; “The Minor Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 1011 (August 10, 1888): 9; J.M. Boekbinder, “The Chevras v. A Free Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 1018 (September 28, 1888): 6.

<sup>128</sup> A., “The Hebras and Minor Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 399 (November 17, 1876): 518.

Synagogue, vehemently discouraged donations on the grounds that these institutions interfered with existing metropolitan synagogues. Not only were there vacant seats in City synagogues located within walking distance of Artillery Lane and competing congregations in the immediate vicinity; the area itself was also rapidly declining as the primary residential area for Jews (the large influx of immigrants had not yet commenced). For Cohen the solution lay in letting seats in US synagogues at reduced prices.<sup>129</sup> One contributor to the *Jewish Chronicle* agreed by complaining that these hevrot continued to prevent foreign Jews “from bearing their share of the communal burdens [and] from becoming assimilated with natives of this country.”<sup>130</sup> Even worse, noted another subscriber, this whole ordeal placed the Jewish community as a whole in an unseemly spotlight. After all, “nothing could be more ridiculous than an appeal to the Christian public for aid to build another church in the city where empty churches abound,” and the Jews’ attempts to do just that was a “disgrace.”<sup>131</sup>

Others, however, opposed these arguments. The architect Nathan Joseph and Samuel Montagu, among others, maintained that minor synagogues such as Sandy’s Row fulfilled a distinct need and that their efforts at self-sufficiency should be respected rather than reviled. Lionel Cohen, protested Joseph in a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*, who is a “king in Chapel-court, a prince in Devonshire-square, and a duke in Duke’s-place, [is] the most powerful man in our community, and his opinion is justly regarded as an authority. But – and please put this in a whisper – he is not always right.” Accusing Cohen of attempting to “crush” hevrot, Joseph stated that the members of Sandy’s Row would be

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<sup>129</sup> See also Vivian Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950*, 71-75.

<sup>130</sup> A Member of the Great Synagogue, “The Hebras,” *JC*, no. 404 (December 22, 1876): 597-598.

<sup>131</sup> Economist, “Minor Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 78 (September 23, 1870): 4; “The Minor Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 404 (December 22, 1876): 597-598.

unable to afford seats in City synagogues even at reduced prices and would be left in the cold without support. These synagogues were “hotbeds of Judaism” exclaimed the architect; “Perhaps they are noisy, but the noise is prayer. Perhaps the preacher’s language is not perfect, but the matter is good, and his people understand him. Perhaps the chazan sings a few false notes, and that does not matter, for the angels are not so critical.” To Joseph, the strong religious commitment of hevra members was “worth more than all the so-called decorum of more ostentatious houses of prayer.”<sup>132</sup>

Cohen fired back that Joseph regarded the matter only in its local context and failed to see the larger implications of supporting independent synagogues. He claimed not to question the religious zeal of the worshippers at Artillery Lane. However, “the moment has arrived for consolidation rather than extension” and in light of this opportunity the support of separatist institutions seemed injudicious. Sandy’s Row should not be seen as an isolated incident; rather, hevrot were part and parcel of the larger synagogue question with which London Jewry struggled. The argument became so heated that the chief rabbi, unwilling to take a firm stand on the issue, declined to deliver the inaugural address at the consecration of the building. To the astonishment of some, the Artillery Lane congregation invited the ecclesiastical head of the London Sephardim to preside over the dedication ceremony.<sup>133</sup> This act silenced Montagu and Cohen, who used

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<sup>132</sup> Nathan S. Joseph, “The Minor Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 76 (September 9, 1870): 3-4.

<sup>133</sup> An anonymous US official expressed his surprise in a letter to the *JC*: “I must own that I was astounded to see that the Ecclesiastical Chief of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews was invited and had consented to inaugurate the synagogue. If the Chief Rabbi declined – for reasons doubtless well considered – to inaugurate the synagogue, it was (so it appears to me) highly insulting to his dignity, and to the peace of the community to offer the ceremonial to a chief of a different congregation. I think had I been such minister. . . I should have judged it opposed to all etiquette, and to all policy, to accept the invidious distinction.” To this official, the inauguration of an Ashkenazi hevra was bad enough, but its dedication ceremony without the presence of the Chief Rabbi rendered the whole event plain offensive. See An Official of the United Synagogue, “Sandy’s Row Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 86 (November 18, 1870): 3.



Sandy's Row as a platform to promote their views on the synagogue question, only temporarily as the debate over hevrot would continue for the next twenty years.

Although it is not quite clear who eventually provided the necessary loans – the congregation was close to 600 pounds in debt by the time of the synagogue's completion – the Sandy's Row building was remodeled and the lease renewed. Measuring 48 feet long and 36 feet wide, the interior provided seats for 500 people, including women. The ark, previously located in the northwest corner, was now located at the southeast side of the building, above which a stained glass rose window appeared. The women's galleries were supported by Doric columns and the central bimah was surrounded by an ornamental cast iron screen. The book stands, reported an editorial in the *Jewish Chronicle*, were “constituted upon a new principle, so as to be quite noiseless when put up or down.”<sup>134</sup> The whole ensemble, although simple in design, presented “an elegant and chaste appearance” – an approach which many Jews, despite their misgivings about hevrot, could appreciate.

While Sandy's Row was the largest hevra in London, there were many more, including the *Hebra Mikrah* (Plotzker Synagogue) with 50 members in Widegate Street, *Derech T'mima* with 90 members in New Court, Fashion Street, and *Menahelem Nishmas Adam* with 112 members in Goulston Street.<sup>135</sup> Samuel Melnick has estimated that some 125 independent Jewish congregations existed in the East End from the late eighteenth century to the onset of World War I, the majority of which were

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<sup>134</sup> “Dedication of Sandy's Row Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 85 (November 11, 1870): 5-7.

<sup>135</sup> Nathan Joseph calculated in 1870 that some twenty hevra synagogues provided services to roughly 2,500 Jews, a number that would increase exponentially in the following decades. See “The Minor Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 78 (September 23, 1870): 3-4.

inconspicuous to the public eye.<sup>136</sup> In Spitalfields, for instance, the “Sons of Warsaw” established a hevra synagogue behind a residence on No. 17 Wilkes Street. The Federation of Synagogues minutes speak of a hevra at 35 Fieldgate Street, which could be approached “through a somewhat dingy passage, and is built in the same way as many workshops in the locality on what was originally an open space at the back of the house.” It had space for 80 to 90 male seats but made no provisions for females. “In the early years of the Federation,” we learn, “several such synagogues were admitted.”<sup>137</sup> Most of these buildings were unrecognizable as houses of worship from the outside, largely because Jews had no need or desire to publicly announce their presence in a neighborhood that was largely Jewish, and because they lacked the resources to do so. Hiring an architect to design a purpose-built synagogue was not an option for most congregations. Beatrice Potter Webb (1858-1943), a contemporary socialist and reformer, described the typical London hevra in Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1902). It is a curious and touching sight, she wrote,

to enter one of the poorer and more wretched of these places on a Sabbath morning. Probably the one you will choose will be situated in a small alley or narrow court, or it may be built out in a back yard. To reach the entrance you stumble over broken pavement and household debris; possibly you pick your way over the rickety bridge connecting it with the cottage property fronting the street. From the outside it appears a long wooden building surmounted by a skylight, very similar in construction to the ordinary sweater’s workshop. You enter; the heat and odour convince you that the skylight is not used for ventilation. From behind the trellis of the ‘ladies gallery’ you see at the far end of the room the richly curtained Ark of the Covenant . . . you may imagine yourself in a far-off Eastern land. But you are roused from your dreams. Your eye wanders from the men who form the congregation, to the small body of women who watch behind the trellis. Here, certainly, you have the Western world, in the bright-coloured ostrich feathers, large bustles, and tight-fitting coats of cotton velvet or brocaded satinette. At last you step out, stifled by the heat and dazed by the strange contrast of the old-world memories of a majestic religion and the squalid vulgarity of an East End slum.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Samuel Melnick, “Sites of Synagogues in East London, 1800-1940,” unpublished. Melnick is quoted in Sharman Kadish, “Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture,” *Architectural History* 45 (2002): 398.

<sup>137</sup> LMA: ACC/2893/01: “The Federation of Synagogues Council Minutes,” January 19, 1897.

<sup>138</sup> Beatrice Webb is quoted in Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour in London*, vol. I (1889): 170.

While Webb's observation contained elements of contempt and exoticism, even romanticism, she accurately describes hevrot as products of dire poverty and generally uncomfortable meeting places. They replicated, by necessity and by popular demand, the East European convention of practicing Judaism in small and informal settings. When immigrants arrived in London, they tended to veer toward the familiar and the secure, and not the Anglicized service of *der Englisher Shul*.<sup>139</sup> Small groups of people who shared a similar regional background (*Landsmänner*) or who practiced the same trade congregated instead in self-chosen and affordable locales. These hevrot were typically linked to so-called friendly societies, which provided comfort and financial support in times of need for a very low weekly fee – the Sandy's Row Synagogue, for instance, was associated with the society "Kindness and Truth," the German Synagogue with *Bikur Holim*, and the Fashion Street Synagogue with "Care of the Sick and Lovers of Jerusalem." For the established Jewish community these societies and their synagogue provisions were a source of embarrassment as they were too foreign, too dirty, too isolationist, "utterly worthless as a civilising medium,"<sup>140</sup> and – particularly when they appeared near community synagogues – too disrespectful of Anglo-Jewish authority.

The United Synagogue was not really successful in its endeavors to minimize hevrot. Its public criticism of and refusal to support minor synagogues had but little effect on the religious practices of the immigrant population (although the second and third generation of these immigrants eventually accepted membership to the US). A report of the early 1890s disclosed frustration over the fact that prayer rooms had been established

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<sup>139</sup> Sharman Kadish contends that East European Jews in London "looked askance at the United Synagogue as *der Englisher Shul* run by uppercrust West End Jews whose personal level of religious observance was highly suspect." See Kadish, "Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture," 386-408.

<sup>140</sup> M. D., "Our Chebras," *JC*, no. 383 (July 28, 1876): 259.

in the vicinity of the New West End and the Central synagogues. Much to the chagrin of Jewish officials, “those foreign Jews” were not impressed by what the natives had to offer and refused to attend a large synagogue. “[But] if you cannot attract them by a fine service,” stated the report, “how can you expect to attract the same class in Whitechapel Ghettos to a big Synagogue?” Disappointed in their inability to bring immigrants into the fold, the report concluded “that they do not wish to associate with English Jews, and that arrangements will [have to] be made for foreigners only. What, in that case, becomes of the Anglicising influence?”<sup>141</sup> To the US, which strongly believed that the synagogue functioned as a civilizing medium, the disinterest of the immigrant population only served as an affirmation of their unsophisticated naïveté.

The US, genuine in its efforts but arrogant in its attitudes towards East European Jews, failed to realize that Anglicization was not the immediate objective of newcomers and that acculturation required time. Relocating to a foreign country was unsettling enough for most immigrants and finding some patterns of familiarity offered reassurance. Samuel Montagu (1832-1911), the Liberal MP for Whitechapel and a strictly Orthodox Jew, realized that eliminating hevrot was both thoughtless and unrealistic. Instead, by “deal[ing] with the Chevras on their own ground, by appealing to the spirit of independence, to the self-interest, to the vanity and other little weaknesses of the working population,” their separatist dimension would be curbed and an English influence would be assured. Indeed, stated Montague, “he hoped that the East London Jews would be stiffnecked in clinging to their old religious customs, and to the complete control of their

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<sup>141</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/14/15/10: “Minority Report.” The US financed free services for the poor in the East End, which were intended to discourage immigrant Jews from attending hevrot and to introduce them to a more decorous form of religious service. In 1889 it introduced “Saturday Afternoon Services for Working Men and Women” at the Great Synagogue,” the Yiddish services of which were apparently well attended, but the English ones were highly unpopular.

synagogues.”<sup>142</sup> Committed to his belief that immigrants should adopt the prevailing habits and customs of British society without sacrificing their religious duties, Montagu challenged the US. In 1887, he founded the *Chevrot B'nai Yisrael* (Federation of Minor Synagogues), an umbrella organization for hevrot in the East End, the aim of which was equally to anglicize Jews, but in a more subtle fashion. The Federation, for instance, advanced loans for the renovation or conversion of existing buildings and provided a professional architect to inspect the premises.<sup>143</sup> It encouraged small congregations to merge so as to increase their resources and enhance the conditions of worship. Membership, after all, was highly desirable as it meant an automatic membership of the Burial Society and financial aid. By denying applications of those hevrot whose premises were too unsanitary or ill-ventilated – the *Kehol Chassidim* Synagogue at 16 Union Street and *Tehillim* at 30 Heneage Street, both in Whitechapel, were rejected due to the unsuitability of their premises – the Federation urged members to take a more active interest in upgrading their facilities. Self-improvement and self-reliance rather than acculturation enforced by the central authorities was Montagu’s main motto.

The Federation’s synagogue model, like that of the US, followed conventional guidelines. Due to limited funds, these synagogues were considerably more modest in scale and decoration, but they duplicated the typical rectangular-shaped, brick buildings

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<sup>142</sup> “Old Castle Street Synagogue,” JC, no. 1133 (December 19, 1890): 11-12. For a detailed account of Montagu’s life see Lily Montagu’s *Samuel Montagu, First Baron Swaythling* (London, 1913).

<sup>143</sup> The architect Lewis Solomon served as honorary architect of the Federation of Synagogues. For a more detailed description of the Federation’s structure, see Sharman Kadish, “Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture,” 399-400; Judy Glasman, “London Synagogues and the Jewish Community, c. 1870-1900,” 78-88; Kadish contends that Montagu’s motives for founding the Federation grew in part out of rivalry with Lionel de Rothschild, the president of the US. This male rivalry, however, proved fairly innocent as both men ultimately aimed for similar goals and were active in both organizations. Montagu was active on the Council’s Committee of the US while Lord Rothschild, the president of the US, was also president of the Federation of Synagogues. By the eve of World War I, the Federation counted over fifty congregations, representing over 6,000 members.

with a traditional Ashkenazi floor-plan – including galleries to encourage female attendance, which was unconventional among East European and Russian Jews. As opposed to US synagogues, most Federation synagogues were not purpose-built and free-standing structures but remodeled homes. As a result they frequently lacked large side windows, receiving natural light instead from skylights. Located in a dense urban neighborhood, light and air were more easily obtained from the ceiling than from street windows. The Federation’s building objectives thus focused primarily on enhancing the interior of already existing buildings, which Montagu believed would be an incentive for the worshipper also to improve himself.

The plans of the Federation, however, were rivaled by an ambitious proposal, made by the United Synagogue, to erect a Toynbee Hall-like center of social welfare in the middle of Whitechapel. The so-called East End Scheme, first introduced in 1889, would include a beth midrash and bet din, offices and dwellings for Jewish officials, and a “colossal synagogue,” all of which would be presided over by a full-time minister, dayan and shamash, and official interpreters.<sup>144</sup> The synagogue was to have close to 1,200 seats, 200 of which were to be free, while 500 would be let at affordable working-class prices. Moreover, approximately 70 seats were to be let at an annual fee of five pounds to the well-to-do, who were expected, as a form of endowment, to leave them empty.<sup>145</sup> The synagogue complex was expected to run a permanent deficit, which the US would cover as a form of long-term subsidy. Not surprisingly, the proposal encountered

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<sup>144</sup> LMA: ACC 2712/01/002: “Scheme for the Foundation of a Synagogue and Provident Society in East London: Report of the Executive Committee on the Following Reference of Council of January 22nd, 1889”; LMA: ACC 2893/01: “The Federation and the East End Scheme of the US,” p. 145.

<sup>145</sup> For further details on the East End Scheme see Judy Glasman, “London Synagogues and the Jewish Community, c. 1870-1900,” 71-77.

much opposition, not merely from the Federation, but also from members inside the United Synagogue.

The East End Scheme revived the synagogue question of the 1870s. Again the main issue revolved around centralized versus decentralized houses of worship, around communal versus local control. The US deemed the proposal, the very structure of which was modeled after old-world traditions, a legitimate substitute for independent hevrot. It freely admitted that its motives were “not wholly philanthropic” and that its own personal interests were involved, for the established community “will have to take care of [it]self in looking after them.”<sup>146</sup> Indeed, argued Benjamin L. Cohen, president of the Jewish Board of Guardians, a large central synagogue would be a powerful agent for minimizing hevrot as “a source of communal danger.” For Cohen, building an attractive building was a form of self-defense and would “infallibly secure both for religion and enlightenment many who have hitherto felt but little of their sway.”<sup>147</sup> Montagu, however, who called the plan absurd, vehemently opposed the scheme and the “additional mode of centralisation.” Not only would it jeopardize the existence of minor synagogues in the area, it would also encourage Jews to remain geographically concentrated in the East End. The goal of the Federation was to move working-class Jews out of the congested slums into better districts, where they would continue their acculturation process. A colossal synagogue would sabotage these objectives and undermine the very existence of the organization. Within the US itself, too, criticism of the plan abounded. While most in principal liked the idea of a religious center that would “humanize” and “ennoble” the immigrant, they were not willing to pay the estimated cost of 20,000 pounds, plus annual

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<sup>146</sup> Noah Davis, who served on the US Enquiry Commission during the battle of Bayswater, was quoted in the *JC* in 1891. See Judy Glasman, “London Synagogues and the Jewish Community, c. 1870-1900,” 71.

<sup>147</sup> “The Minor Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 1011 (August 10, 1888): 9.

deficits. Due to a combination of West London Jewry's apathy and East London Jewry's opposition, the East End Scheme was finally shelved in 1898.

Both the Federation and the US played a significant role in designing the synagogal landscape in Victorian London. They aided congregations in their attempts to practice Judaism, either according to Adlerian or to East European Orthodoxy. They strove to prevent religious indifference and promote the Anglicization of London residents, albeit through very different means. And despite their different approach and audience, they both constructed synagogues that reflected the realities of the day. The US produced self-supporting district synagogues that met the needs of migrating, upwardly mobile Jews and that conformed to British society. Their modesty, or, in the words of Sharman Kadish, their architectural inconsequentiality, was equally detectable in Federation synagogues, although in East London this was more directly related to financial limitations. Both models, however, avoided public ostentation – indeed Federation synagogues, it was hoped, would in time diminish the immigrants' ungentlemanly display of Jewishness in the public sphere. However much the US and the Federation were therefore at odds, from an architectural viewpoint their synagogues reveal a shared philosophy.

### **Jews Become News: Gentile Receptivity**

Compared to Amsterdam, Jewish life in London received considerable notice from the public press, although it focused more on foreign Jews in the East End and abroad than on the established community. The large number of East European and Russian immigrants and the deterioration of the Jewish quarter – both of which occurred on a far smaller scale in the Dutch capital – drew growing attention from concerned



reform advocates, political conservatives, and curious locals. Their responses ranged from a romanticized fascination with these “exotic” strangers to an outright aversion to their “unassimilable” nature, which supposedly contributed to keeping wages low and rents high. For people like Beatrice Potter Webb, the transformed East End exuded an aura of mystery that invited, much to the embarrassment of native Jews, a gentile gaze; for others, the area was the very nucleus of immorality and degeneracy that threatened the civilized state of Victorian society. The gruesome Jack the Ripper murders in the early 1880s, one of which occurred close to the Jewish Socialist Club in Berner Street, intensified the image of the East End as a place of danger and transgression. In the popular press, the exoticism and the perceived “threat” of foreign Jews to the well-being of London were often combined into stereotypical or sensationalized depictions. Seeping through, however, was a confidence that the problems of overcrowding, sweating, crime, and pauperism in east London could be solved through proper handling, either through education, social reform, and Anglicization, or through the more radical method of conversion or immigration control.

A number of factors had heightened public interest in the “oriental” Other. The Crimean War, the 1840 Damascus Affair, explorations to China and Palestine, and the British Empire’s trade relations with the East brought newspaper correspondents to unfamiliar places. While on assignment, they reported on a variety of subjects and foreign Jews were a common topic of interest. *The Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, and *The Illustrated London Times* regularly featured detailed stories and sketches on Jews in China, Samarkand, North Africa, and Russia, informing audiences of their living conditions, cultural and religious eccentricities, and hardships due to

restrictions or antisemitic outbursts.<sup>148</sup> *The Graphic*, for instance, included “character sketches” of Jews in Romania, Vienna, and Samarkand, as well as large prints made by professional artists, such as J. E. Hodgson’s “The Coral Merchant” (1874) and “A Jerusalem Jew” (anonymous, 1894). An 1873 edition of *The Illustrated London News* boldly chose a picture of a pious Jew wearing a *tallis* and *tefillin* for its front cover. The painting by Carl Haag, inaccurately entitled “An Ashkenazim,” was part of the exhibition of the Society of Water-Colour Painters and was accompanied in the newspaper by an explanation of Jewish religious rituals (fig. 14). Displayed on news stands throughout London, it exposed gentile readers and passersby to a form of religious worship with which they were utterly unfamiliar.<sup>149</sup> Jews, in other words, were part of London’s public discourse, revealing a deep curiosity of the Other.

Synagogues played only a peripheral role in the depictions of foreign Jews; they were stage props set in the background without which the description seemed incomplete. An 1876 sketch from *The Graphic*, for instance, portrays a barefoot Jewish scholar, wrapped in layers of cloth, writing or carving in front of an open window (fig. 15). Sunlight is coming in, illuminating a bare wall and an opened book lying on a crib-like table. A young man sitting opposite to him is reading, his humble posture and dark-grey depiction in respectful contrast to the light and centrality of his master. The setting is a synagogue, but we only learn this by the title, which reads “In the Synagogue of the White Jews, Cochin” [India]. Likewise, an 1856 article in the *Illustrated Times* describes

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<sup>148</sup> See, among others, Joseph Pennell’s extensive series on Jews in Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Russia: “The Jew at Home,” *The Illustrated London News* (December 26, 1891); “Colony of Jews in the Centre of China,” *The Illustrated London News* (December 13, 1851).

<sup>149</sup> See, e.g., “The Jewish Question in Roumania – Character Sketches in Galatz,” *The Graphic* (November 1, 1879); “Sketches in Vienna,” *The Illustrated London Times* (July 26, 1873); “Jews of Samarkand,” *The Pictorial World* (January 20, 1877); “Young Jewish Woman of Cairo,” *The Illustrated London Times* (November 18, 1882); “The Choral Merchant,” *The Graphic* (June 27, 1874); “An Ashkenazim,” *The Illustrated London News* (June 26, 1875); “A Jerusalem Jew,” *The Graphic* (May 5, 1894).

and depicts “The Jews’ Walk at Odessa,” which makes no reference to synagogues at all until the very end. The three city synagogues, the author concluded, were “unpretending looking buildings” that “more resemble private dwellings than temples of religion.”<sup>150</sup> The implied presence or brief comment of synagogues, it seems, added a layer of legitimacy or authenticity to the story. It was the people themselves, rather than their (inconspicuous) religious buildings that first caught the Westerner’s eye.

Synagogues set in London, however, received more attention from the popular press. Architectural journals such as *The Builder* and *Building News* offered brief but respectful descriptions of new edifices. Newspapers and magazines, too, reported on inaugural celebrations and the High Holidays, which drew “large numbers of Christians to the synagogue.”<sup>151</sup> Their opinion about the building’s architecture was generally positive. Gentiles, after all, could appreciate the dignified styles in which most Victorian houses of worship were built. What is surprising, however, is that some gentiles responded in the very same manner to synagogues as did their Christian forefathers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The buildings themselves were commended for their charm, but even after a permanent presence of Jews in London since the 1650s, Christians still perceived the activities inside as unnerving and thoroughly un-English. One visitor to the Great Synagogue described the edifice as “elegant,” but found himself transported back to “the wilderness” when listening to the service. “We merely stood spectators of a curious scene,” he wrote, “noting as it were the manners of a people strange to us . . . We looked upon the living, breathing Jews around us as a part of history – a strange anachronism in the present day, having no single thing

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<sup>150</sup> “The Jews’ Walk at Odessa,” *The Illustrated London Times* (April 19, 1856); “In the Synagogue of the White Jews, Cochin,” *The Graphic* (February 5, 1876).

<sup>151</sup> D. L. Davis, “Christian Visits to Jewish Synagogues,” *JC*, no. 66 (July 1, 1870): 4.

in common with us but the one fact that they were men.”<sup>152</sup> While the observer admitted that his “utter ignorance of the unaccustomed rites” contributed to his discomfort, he could not imagine that these Jewish men considered themselves as much English inside as outside of the synagogue – he certainly did not.<sup>153</sup> Another observer, who related his experience in the *City Press*, found the Great Synagogue “particularly plain” and not worth talking about, but he did elaborate on his acute sense of “Gentile perplexity.” Upon entering the building, he wrote, “you find yourself immediately in a whirlwind of guttural sounds [and] you seem to have entered a school where everyone is saying his lesson aloud.”<sup>154</sup> These visitors were struck by the contrast between the Englishness of the building’s exterior and the foreignness of the interior, between the familiarity of its public appearance and the “exoticism” that occurred behind closed doors – a combination they still considered somewhat suspect.

Synagogues also made an appearance in popular literature. *The Illustrated London News*, for instance, featured two serials in which the main characters were Jews and in which synagogues at times served as the setting. In Walter Besant’s *The Rebel Queen* (1893), a Christian woman named Francesca described a religious service, which she perceived as “barbaric” and “warlike”: “This is the service of a race of warriors,” she pondered, and although “these were just her first impressions, these are mostly true.” Hall Caine’s installments of *The Scapegoat* (1891) featured an illustration of Moroccan Jews immersed in a dispute in the main body of the synagogue. Describing the story of a

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<sup>152</sup> See *The Illustrated London Times* (December 8, 1855). This article can be read in full in Anne and Roger Cowen’s *Victorian Jews Through British Eyes* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998), 103-105.

<sup>153</sup> “The Synagogue in Great St. Helen’s, Bishopsgate Street,” *The Illustrated London Times* (December 8, 1855). Religious services were particularly foreign to Christian observers prior to the 1870s, when aesthetic reforms had not yet been introduced, or were at least not widespread.

<sup>154</sup> “A Christian Notice of the Great Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 81(October 14, 1870): 7.

Jewish tax collector named Israel ben Oliel and his deaf and blind daughter Naomi in the town of Tetuan, Hall describes in detail the trial held in the synagogue that would sentence Israel to death. In these fictional pieces synagogue interiors were presented as foreign spaces buzzing with unfamiliar sights and sounds, inherently alien to any Christian visitor and therefore perpetually exotic.

These impressions caused concern among the acculturated Jewish public. It did not serve their cause well if Christian public opinion was shaped by old stereotypes. Native Jews, apprehensive of being misrepresented by foreigners, actively tried to improve their image, both inside and outside of the synagogue. In 1887 they organized the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition in Albert Hall, which historian Tony Kushner described as part of a defensive strategy at a time when the Jewish presence in Britain gained visibility.<sup>155</sup> The large-scale exhibition, which displayed a collection of Jewish art, religious artifacts, and a brass model of Solomon's Temple, was intended "to remove something of the mystery which somehow seems in the mind of the outside world to environ all that is Jewish" and deliberately omitted any reference to immigrants and the East End.<sup>156</sup> The Chief Rabbi, who preached on the significance of the exhibit in the Bayswater synagogue, heartily endorsed the attempt to display Anglo-Jewish progress. While it was true that the community's "strength and wisdom lie in dignified reserve, in the absence of all ostentation," Adler argued that in this case the educational cause legitimized the means.

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<sup>155</sup> Tony Kushner, "The End of the 'Anglo-Jewish Progress Show': Representations of the Jewish East End, 1887-1987," *Immigrants and Minorities* 10: 1-2 (March/July 1991): 78-105; Richard I. Cohen, "Urban Visibility and Biblical Visions: Jewish Culture in Western and Central Europe in the Modern Age," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002): 753-755.

<sup>156</sup> "The Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition," *JC*, no. 941 (April 8, 1887): 1-4.

Synagogue architecture and religious reforms served similar purposes. After all, stated the *JC*, “architecture [was] one of the most signal proofs of the refined taste of citizens.”<sup>157</sup> Dignified structures would publicly communicate the Jews’ internalization of Victorian culture and render public approval of a Jewish presence in the neighborhood more likely. And Christians generally did respond positively to the emergence of new houses of worship – we know that church bells were ringing near the East London Synagogue to mark its inauguration in 1873<sup>158</sup> and that London periodicals spoke well of new edifices. They approved because these buildings adhered to popular aesthetic tastes and because any attempts to improve religious behavior was considered a social virtue. Gentiles were less enthusiastic about what took place inside the synagogue, but this caused no offense as long as it remained private. That the separation between public and private was less distinct with the immigrant population, whose foreignness was ubiquitous, was one of the various reasons why they were considered a “problem.”

We should be careful, however, not to overrate the interest of gentiles in London synagogues. While Christians attended services and while a number of writers used synagogues as literary tools in their artistic endeavors, the vast majority of Londoners never visited these buildings. They had no reason or desire to do so. As in Amsterdam, Jewish concerns over etiquette and representation far outweighed the interest of the gentile public in Jewish affairs. This suggests that the process of acculturation and integration was perhaps succeeding more rapidly than Anglo-Jews themselves anticipated. The United Synagogue’s aim of constructing unimposing and uncontroversial

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<sup>157</sup> “Consecration of the New Synagogue at Liverpool,” *JC*, no. 289 (September 4, 1874): 365.

<sup>158</sup> “The East London Synagogue,” *JC*, no. 369 (April 21, 1876): 38-39. Peter Renton also made mark of this event in *The Lost Synagogues of London* (London: Tynsder Publishing, 2000): 92.

buildings was in this respect very successful; in such an enormous city as London most synagogues did not provoke a strong public response and blended in quite easily.

## **Conclusion**

In high-Victorian London, purpose-built synagogues functioned as barometers for Anglo-Jewish acculturation. United Synagogue and Federation buildings conveyed to the public the community's religious respectability and good citizenship, as well as its belief that religious distinctiveness was better served in private. London synagogues were therefore much more "Jewish" on the inside than on the outside. This does not mean that Jews felt uncomfortable or insecure, but rather that they had internalized contemporary Victorian codes regarding appropriate public and private display. The words "proper," "dignified," "unpretending," and "respectable" – all desirable social and cultural attributes – were abundant in newspaper descriptions of religious buildings at the time. It was precisely these qualities, rather than architectural conspicuousness or flamboyance, which rendered local synagogues beautiful in the eyes of the contemporary Londoner. What twentieth-century fine arts historians thus categorized as "dull" or "architecturally inconsequential" was for most London Jews quite gratifying. Although not everyone acquiesced to these prevailing norms – the Battle of Bayswater disclosed some elite members' preference for architectural largesse – the central authority of the US generally secured the principle of aesthetic composure.

The architecture of emancipation, which had a pronounced Moorish flavor on the continent, translated in London into the embrace of wide-ranging aesthetic possibilities. Synagogues in a variety of architectural styles appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, ranging from Italian Renaissance to Byzantine to Romanesque

inspired designs. According to Carol Krinsky this diversity “reveal[s] uncertainty about the image that Jews wished to convey to themselves and others.”<sup>159</sup> I would argue, however, that no distinctive Jewish style emerged in London because Jews were not looking for one. They were quite sure about the image they were trying to convey – that of respectability and assimilability – and they accomplished this by embracing the eclectic atmosphere prevalent in England at the time.

With respect to the synagogue interior, its structural arrangement remained Orthodox. Modest reforms, after all, required modest architectural adaptations. We do witness the integration of some English social and religious norms into the design plan; a vestibule where couples could meet after the service became a common feature, as did the centralization of the pulpit and the incorporation of a choir gallery, all of which were believed to meet and enhance contemporary standards of etiquette. However, while the interior was made aesthetically pleasing, there was no attempt to camouflage the commitment to Orthodox Judaism. “We love England much,” stated Nemo in the *Jewish Chronicle*, but “we need not love Zion less.”<sup>160</sup> For those congregations who could afford it, this love of Zion expressed itself in elaborate decorations, especially of the apse containing the ark, *parokhet*, and marble columns. The maintenance of separate seating arrangements, the absence of an organ, and the refusal to remove liturgical references to the messianic age or the chosenness of the Jewish people further attests to the persistence of Adlerian Orthodoxy.

Nemo and others could declare their loyalty to both England and to Jewish tradition because they felt confident in their political status, although more so during the

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<sup>159</sup> Carol Krinsky, “Between Europe and the New World: Britain's Place in Synagogue Architecture,” *Building Jerusalem: Jewish Architecture in Britain* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 29.

<sup>160</sup> Nemo, “The Contemplated Synod,” *JC*, no. 11 (June 13, 1869): 3.



third quarter of the nineteenth century than during the last. Jews in London, as opposed to those in Berlin, did not feel pressured to make a public statement about their “worthiness” as citizens of the state or to minimize their Jewish identity. “We must not be misled by our acquisition of political rights into any abandonment of our religious distinctiveness,” preached the *Jewish Chronicle*, “the more a Jew respects himself and his religion, the more will others respect him.”<sup>161</sup> Victorian society accepted religious diversity and encouraged pious behavior, but it tolerated these only within an almost exclusively English cultural framework that denounced an ostentatious advertising of difference. The denial of religious faith and identity was thus improper and unnecessary, allowing Jews to adopt a dual identity.

The level of acculturation could be further measured by the synagogue taking on a secular dimension. It became a space not merely for religious devotion and assembly; it became a stage to display bourgeois respectability and patriotic loyalties as well as political discontent and economic distress. Weddings, the synagogue parade, and special services for Jewish military men, for example, rendered the synagogue a public arena for the expression of communal ambitions and local concerns. Indeed, London synagogues became sites in which the tensions between communal centralization and local independence, between oligarchy and democracy, between political conservatism and socialist radicalism became particularly visible. Precisely at a time when growing secularization reduced the centrality of the synagogue in the everyday lives of London

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<sup>161</sup> “The Position of the Jewish Community,” *JC*, no. 254 (February 6, 1874): 752-753.

Jews – roughly 10 to 15 percent of the population attended weekly services<sup>162</sup> – it reflected more comprehensively than before the Anglo-Jewish experience.

Lastly, the location and scale of high-Victorian synagogues reflected the new realities of London Jewry. Geographical dispersal and limited funds rendered the building of modest-sized district synagogues far more feasible and sensible than the erection of one monumental structure. If the US and the Federation were going to keep a fragmenting London Jewry observant, and if they were going to secure communal revenue, they could only do so by providing Jews with a multitude of synagogues – a challenge that demanded financial prudence. In addition to cultural conformity, London synagogue architecture was equally determined by pragmatism.

In retrospect one might argue that the US and the Federation were very successful. Both organizations, which exist to this day, significantly contributed to the centralization of London Jewry and to the proliferation of purpose-built synagogues, although one cannot deny that their admirable efforts failed to halt the forces of secularization and the integration of Anglo-Jews into English society. However, one can also argue that while the buildings themselves became less central to Jewish life, the discourses about synagogues and their assigned role in the Anglicization process of East European immigrants continued to render them central to Anglo-Jewish identity. Whether synagogues were successful in keeping Anglo-Jewry observant or in Anglicizing the immigrant population is thus not the main issue here; of importance is that people constantly talked about them. Whether this discourse revolved around choirs, weddings,

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<sup>162</sup> According to Geoffrey Alderman, *The British Weekly* of 1886 reported that between 10 and 15 percent of the total Jewish population of west and north-west London attended Sabbath services, indicating that belonging to a synagogue was often more important than actually attending it. See *Modern British Jewry*, 106.

“dangerous” hevrot, or the construction of one monumental landmark versus several district buildings, the language of the synagogue was central to Victorian Jewry.

In Berlin, the topic of the next chapter, the language of the synagogue was equally ubiquitous, although in the Prussian context its content and tone differed dramatically.

Let us now return to the continent.



Fig. 31: East London Synagogue, 1873



Fig. 32: Bayswater Synagogue, 1863

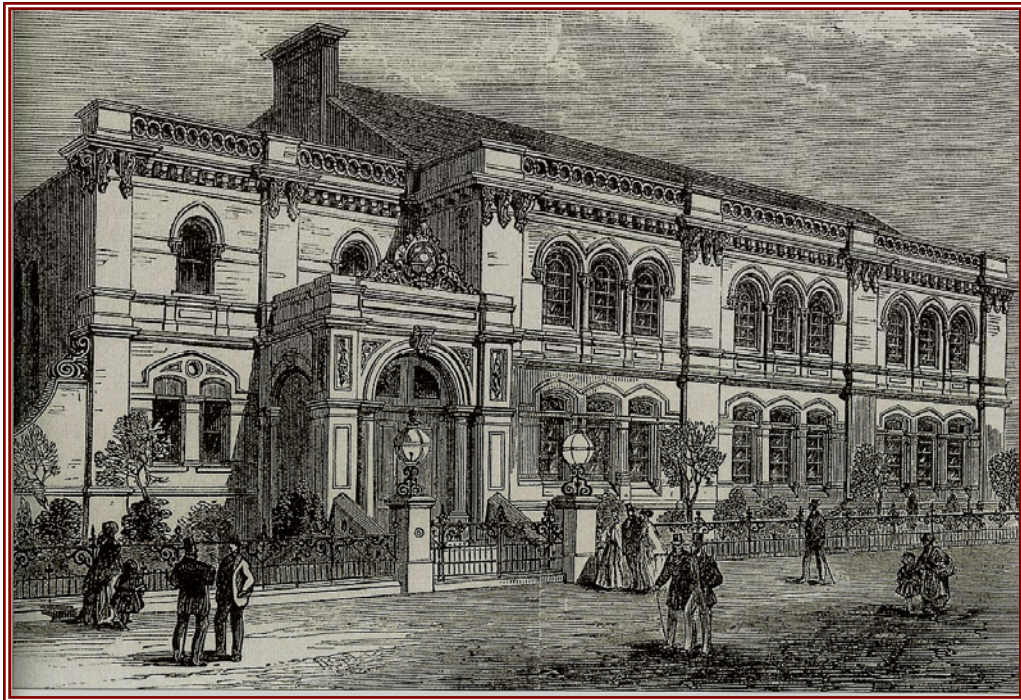


Fig. 33: North London Synagogue, 1868



Fig. 34: Dalston Synagogue, 1884



Figs. 35 and 36: Advertisements for olive oil and tea in the *Jewish Chronicle* and *The Graphic*



Fig. 37: The Rothschild Wedding in the Central Synagogue



Fig. 38: The Wedding Ceremony in the Central Synagogue. Notice the Women in the Audience

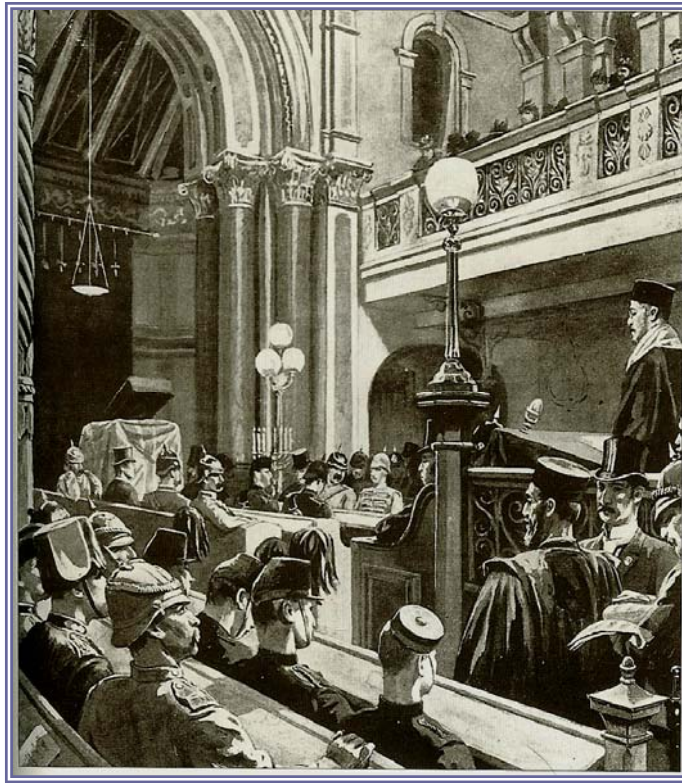
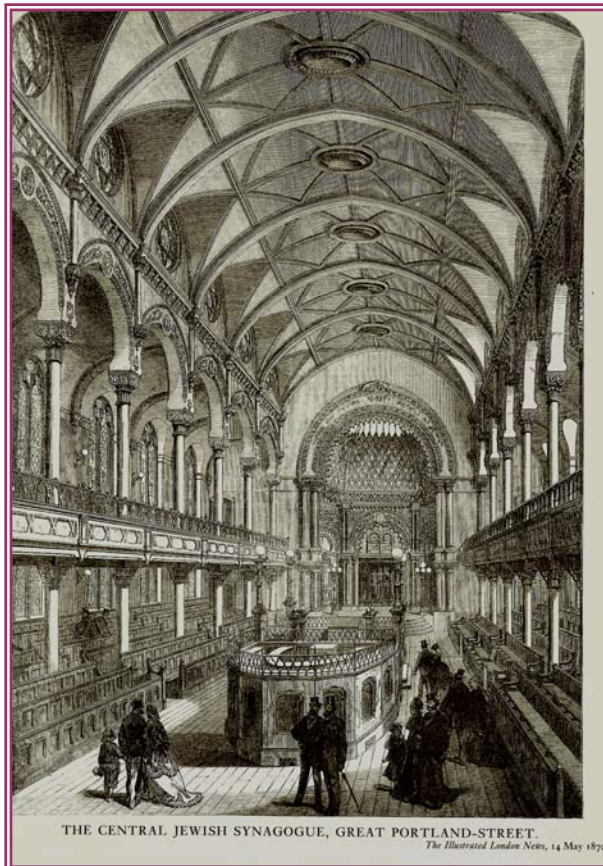


Fig. 39: Special Hanukkah service for Jewish soldiers and volunteers at the Borough Synagogue. *The Graphic* (1893)

Fig. 40: Interior Central Synagogue (1870)



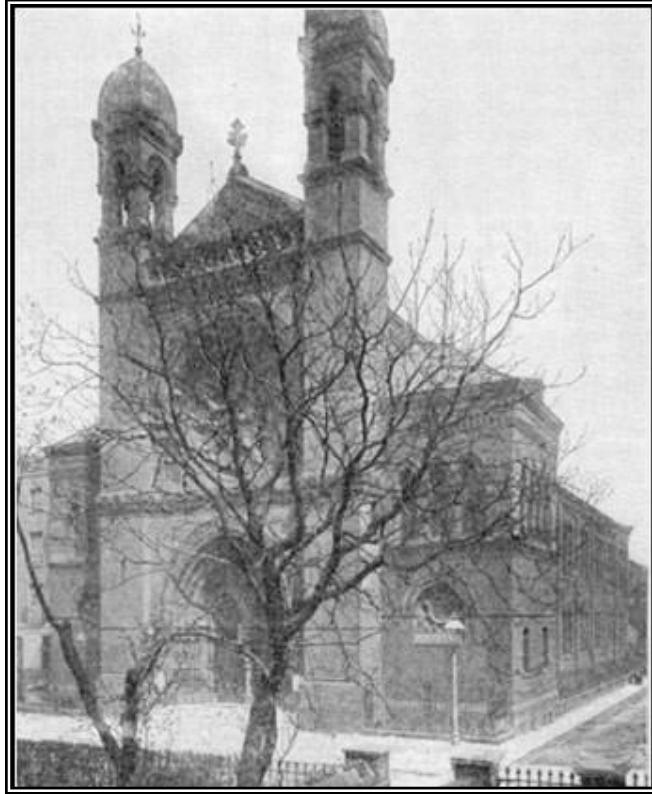


Fig. 41: New West End Synagogue, 1879



Fig. 42: Jewish Residential Concentration in the East End  
Source: The Jewish Encyclopdia



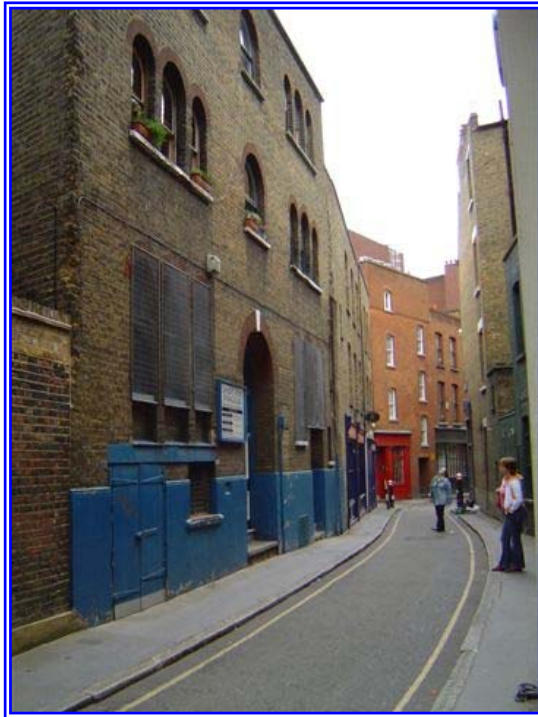


Fig. 43: Sandy's Row Synagogue  
Source: Personal Collection



Fig. 44: "An Askenazim" by Carl Haag  
Source: *The Illustrated London News* (1873)

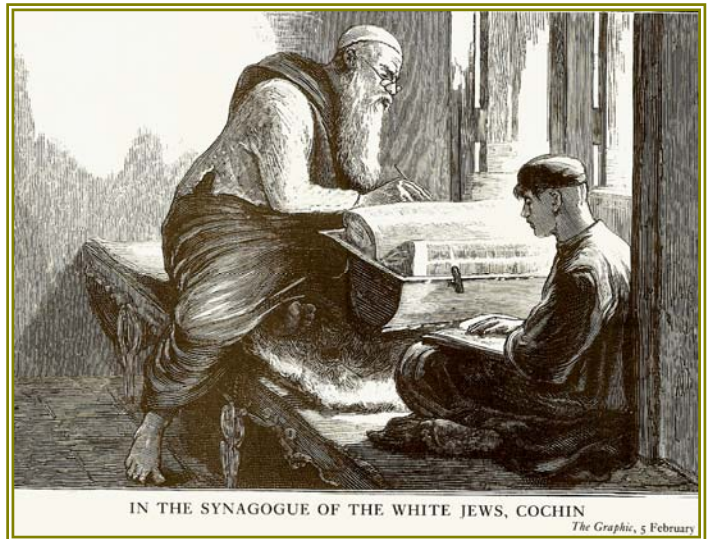


Fig. 45: "In the Synagogue of the White Jews, Cochinchina"  
Source: *The Graphic* (1876)

## Chapter V

### An Architecture of Emancipation or an Architecture of Separatism? Synagogue Building in Berlin



Fig. 46: Emile de Cauwer, 1865

“Das Bauwerk, will es Anspruch auf ein monumentales machen, muß vor allem national sein. Der deutsche Jude muß also im deutschen Staate im deutschen Style bauen.” [The building, if it wants to make a claim to monumentality, first and foremost has to be national. The German Jew in a German state should therefore build in a German style.]

~ *Edwin Oppler, 1864*

“Der deutsche Jude will vor allem ein Deutscher sein, er kämpft und leidet für Gleichstellung mit seinen christlichen Brüdern, kann und darf er sich dann durch sein Gotteshaus ohne jeden rituellen Grund isolieren? Soll er sich durch die Annahme des maurischen Styles, Eigenschaften seines Charakters und seiner Gefuehlsweise andichten lassen, die keineswegs zur Hebung seiner selbst bei seinen Mitmenschen beitragen? Bei der Errichtung eines Gotteshauses muss man darnach streben, nächst einem schönen Bauwerke zugleich ein nationales zur errichten, dieses muß es aber sein, soll es ein monumentales werden. Bauwerke zur Ehre Gottes errichtet, können und dürfen nur monumentale sein.”

[The German Jew wants above all to be German; he struggles and suffers for equality to his Christian brothers; should his house of worship then isolate him? Should he let character traits and sentiments be ascribed to him that in no way contribute to his elevation in the eyes of his fellow man, solely due to the adoption of a Moorish style? When erecting a synagogue, the aim is to establish a beautiful as well as a national building, a requirement if it wants to become monumental. Buildings dedicated to God can and should only be monumental.

~ *Edwin Oppler, 1865*

In the summer of 1865, a full year before the completion of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue in the center of Berlin, an anonymous letter appeared in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* [AZdJ], the most widely read Jewish periodical in the German-speaking lands. Its author acknowledged the beauty of the new building emerging before everyone's eyes and the "good taste" of those involved in the production of this magnificent synagogue [*Prachttempel*]. Berlin, after all, he said somewhat snootily, "did not yet possess any religious buildings worth seeing" and this synagogue truly was an ornament to the Prussian capital. The author, however, questioned the usefulness and expediency of such a monumental structure. "The time has passed," he argued, "when the majority of Jews are crowded in one district; a large contingent has moved to western neighborhoods and it would have been more appropriate and more conducive to religious attendance, had we built moderate-sized synagogues in a variety of districts as opposed to one excessively large one."<sup>1</sup> In Paris, he explained, two synagogues had been built in opposite neighborhoods, each of which amounted to one million francs, while in Berlin only one structure emerged at the extravagant cost of three-and-a-half million francs. Emphasizing the latter's impracticality – especially for Orthodox women living in western districts, for whom the walking distance of more than an hour was "too great of a sacrifice," providing an "excuse" to stay home on the Sabbath – the Oranienburgerstraße building would achieve the very opposite end for which it was intended, namely a growing absence of Jewish worshippers. If this was indeed the case, concluded the author, then "surely it is worth posing the question to what purpose we have built at all?"

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<sup>1</sup> "Berlin," *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 29, no. 32 (August 8, 1865): 492-493. The quotations in this paragraph are from this article.

This question comprises the central theme of this chapter. While our author overestimated the extent to which the Berlin Jewish population had moved to better neighborhoods – the majority still lived in the Berlin Mitte district in the 1860s – it is true that the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue was built in a residential area that prosperous Jews were beginning to leave behind. Moreover, the community financed what was at the time the most expensive and largest synagogue in the world, surpassing those built in west European capitals, where Jews generally enjoyed more civil rights and liberties than was the case in Prussia. Drawing public attention by means of a conspicuous building in a bold oriental design countered the approaches to synagogue building seen in London and Amsterdam. Why and for what purpose Berlin Jewry erected a spectacular Moorish structure in the old city center, then, are legitimate questions to which our contributor to the *AZdJ* found only partial answers.

To him the incentives for monumental synagogue architecture lay in “the pleasure of building itself,” even if this meant the Jewish community would shoulder a heavy debt. “It is just the way things are nowadays,” he wrote, “to ask with every enterprise ‘where do we obtain the money?’ rather than ‘who will pay it back?’”<sup>2</sup> Building extravagantly for the sake of extravagance, in other words, seemed to be the primary factor driving synagogue architecture in Berlin. While there might be some truth to his claim – large-scale building projects were increasingly common in Europe due to industrialization, population growth, and the expansion of the building industry – it is a simplistic answer to a complex question. We have to take into account, for instance, the fact that the Oranienburgerstraße project was initiated in the mid-1850s, at a time when Jewish

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<sup>2</sup> “Das Bauen selbst macht ihnen Vergnügen, und wenn auch der Gemeinde dadurch einen große Schuld auferlegt wird. Est ist nun einmal Charakter unserer Zeit, daß sie bei allen Unternehmungen nur frage: Woher das Geld bekommen? nicht aber: Wie es wieder zurückgeben?” Ibid, 493.

residential migration was the exception rather than the rule and when the construction of one large house of worship in Berlin Mitte was the most logical choice. The Jewish community was also in desperate need of a large space as the existing communal synagogue in the Heidereutergasse, with its 500 seats, and the *Notsynagoge* in the Großen Hamburgerstraße, with space for an additional 1,800 worshippers, had ceased to be adequate much earlier. More than 13,000 Jews lived in the Prussian capital in the 1850s, and every year during the High Holidays the lack of space became more pressing. Furthermore, we have to consider the socio-economic position of the congregation, which, despite the exorbitant construction costs of the synagogue, was prosperous enough to shoulder this debt as well as that of additional building projects, such as the Jewish hospital (also located in the Oranienburgerstraße). For a community that was financially comfortable, that did not need to spend a significant proportion of its communal budget on poor relief – as was the case in Amsterdam – and that strove for bourgeois respectability, building a monumental synagogue was not an irresponsible enterprise.

But the most important force driving this project was the legal status and the socio-political ambitions of the community. This determined to a great extent the size, location, style, and interior floor-plan of the synagogue. While the building was inaugurated in the fall of 1866, its conception and design originated in the mid-1850s, when the community designated the Oranienburgerstraße plot for the location of the new synagogue and when the Protestant architect Eduard Knoblauch submitted his first set of drawings. As we shall see, this was a time of post-revolutionary tensions and political ambiguities, especially with regard to the legal status of the Jews. The 1848/49 revolution had not solved the question of Jewish status in Prussia. Indeed, argued the historian

Werner Mosse, the revolution had “retarded political emancipation . . . its failure, if anything, meant a temporary re-affirmation in many places of the doctrine of the Christian State.”<sup>3</sup> Despite the growing volume of liberal voices, legislation granting equality to the Jews failed, leaving the matter “at an intermediate stage that was not free of ambiguities.”<sup>4</sup> That Berlin Jewry proposed a massive building program precisely at a time when emancipation was in close reach but again obstructed is therefore no coincidence. It needed to make a strong appeal, a strong public statement that forcefully communicated its presence and its claim to citizenship. Now that it had the financial means and municipal permission to do so, Jewish leadership did not hesitate to build their *Prachttempel*. The Oranienburgerstraße synagogue was therefore a demand for emancipation rather than its consequence.<sup>5</sup>

The new building and German synagogue architecture at large cannot be interpreted outside of the context in which both took shape. They were part and parcel of the prolific intellectual, cultural, and literary milieu of nineteenth-century German Jewry, the roots of which lie in the persistent illiberalism of the German states and the lasting power of aristocratic conservatism. Precisely because German Jews (contrary to their Dutch and English counterparts) had to justify political emancipation, they produced

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<sup>3</sup> Werner E. Mosse, “The Revolution of 1848: Jewish Emancipation in Germany and its Limits,” in Werner E. Mosse, Arnold Pauker, and Reinhard Rürup (eds.), *Revolution and Evolution: 1848 in German-Jewish History* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981): 389.

<sup>4</sup> Reinhard Rürup, “The European Revolutions of 1848 and Jewish Emancipation,” in *Revolution and Evolution*, 22. Rürup argues that the political turmoil of the late 1840s brought a fundamental change in the self-awareness and self-image of Jews in the German states: “After 1848, the Jews ceased to mere passive objects of politics, and in the teeth of prejudice and in defiance of old and new restrictions took a hand in fashioning their own destiny as well as that of the wider body politic.”

<sup>5</sup> Many scholars of synagogue architecture, such as Dominique Jarrassé, Brian deBreffney, and Scott Lerner, have explained the phenomenon of monumental synagogues as a product of emancipation and a symbol of success. However, if monumental synagogues were simply a visual testimony to European Jewry’s successful movement toward acculturation and integration, then the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue should attest to a success story in German-Jewish relations, which is an incomplete reading of the situation.

a large body of books and journals, pamphlets and petitions that were rich in self-observation and in presenting “evidence” of Jewish progress. Ironically, the reconfirmation of Jewish difference after each failed attempt to eliminate legal restrictions only stimulated intellectual productivity aiming to disprove this difference, which further distinguished German-Jewry from its gentile counterparts. The new synagogue was the aesthetic representation of this quest, another vehicle to press the claim for equality. In almost every way, the building “proved” that German-Jews had become *gebildete Bürger*. Its design, for instance, attested to the Jews’ architectural sophistication, the organ – although hidden from view – announced the Jews’ willingness to modernize their religious practices, the fixed pews facing the lectern confirmed the congregation’s dedication to silent etiquette, and the visibility of the golden dome demanded that Berliners face the reality of a permanent Jewish presence in their midst. “[German Jews] have had and must continue to fight, step by step, for civil equality and for their recognition in life and society,” wrote the *AZdJ* in 1863. Constructing a monumental synagogue was a powerful weapon with which to fight this battle.

Indeed, Jewish political discourse at the time of the synagogue’s conception and construction reveals skepticism of and frustration with Prussian promises. The record of Prussian politicians had not been particularly promising and while progress had been made over the course of the nineteenth century, Jews were still disadvantaged and political emancipation was still incomplete. When reforms passed legislation, they were often ignored in practice.<sup>6</sup> “I shouldn’t have to be the first one to tell you more perceptive

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance “Wer sollte es glauben?,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 22: 27 (June 28, 1858): 365-366; “Das Recht der Juden,” *AZdJ* 22: 11 (March 8, 1858): 141-142: “Die Rechtsverhältnisse unserer Glaubensgenossen sind allerdings in den letzten Jahren nicht vorwärts gekommen. . . in Preussen steht die Gleichheit aller Preussen ohne Unterschied der Religion noch immer nur in der Verfassungsurkunde, ohne

[readers],” wrote an anonymous contributor to the *AZdJ* in 1866 on the subject of German-Jewry’s political struggles, “that it would be a terrible self-deception to think that Judaism and its confessors have reached a final stage in their varied histories and henceforth will follow only one straight, smooth path along which they will be able to determine their own fate.”<sup>7</sup> Legal emancipation was not a given, not an inevitability that lay just around the corner. It was not time that produced great achievements, preached Abraham Geiger in the newly-inaugurated synagogue, but rather the actions of dedicated individuals. It was therefore the task of Berlin Jews themselves to ensure progress was made.<sup>8</sup> Achieving full equality required a pro-active stance on the part of Prussian Jewry and building a landmark synagogue was one way to advance its claim. The Oranienburger building thus simultaneously refuted and confirmed the still fragile, unresolved political status of German Jews.

Unlike synagogues in Amsterdam and London, then, the Berlin structure sought the public limelight. It emerged in a milieu dramatically different from that in Holland and Great Britain and consequently we cannot ascribe to it similar meanings. Lindsay Jones’ theory on the human experience of architecture, which emphasized the triangular interrelationship among building, human actors, and historical context in the production of meaning, demonstrated that an analysis of synagogues needs to include proper

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dass die Verwirklichung sich blicken lässt.” Similar observations are expressed throughout the 1860s, for instance in “Die Gleichberechtigung der Juden in Preussen,” *AZdJ* 30: 32 (August 7, 1866): 499-501.

<sup>7</sup> “Ein Brief über die Politik in der Gegenwart,” *AZdJ* 30: 9 (February 27, 1866): 127.

<sup>8</sup> Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People [CAHJP], Jerusalem: D/Be4/168, “Fest-Predigten zur Säkularfeier der jüdische Gemeinde in Berlin am 10. September 1871.” Geiger states: “Denn wohl geschieht Alles in der Zeit, doch nicht durch die nackte Zeit allein. Die Tage, wie sie dahingeschieden, kehren in gleicher Gestalt wider zurück, die Jahresabschnitte gelangen in ihrem Kreislaufe wider zu dem verlassenen Punkte, der Zeiger nimmt nach vollgezogenem Gange wieder gleichmäßig die alte Stelle ein. Allein die Menschen in der Zeit fördern durch ihr Denken und Schaffen, erwirken die fortschreitende Entwicklung . . . Dein Beruf, Gemeinde Berlin, ist es, nicht mühsam nachzukeuchen der nothwendig und gesetzmaessig hervortretenden Bewegung der Geister, der fortschreitenden Entwicklung des Judenthums . . . sondern eine Führerin zu sein und den Weckruf laut ertönen zu lassen.”



attention to space and place. Simply put, to understand what these buildings meant for Jews, we need to situate them in their local environment. For a new synagogue meant something different for a Jew in 1860s Berlin than it did for a co-religionist in London precisely because they lived in different circumstances. Both Jews probably agreed that their new buildings were a necessity due to population growth and a lack of available space. Both Jews mostly likely reveled in their new buildings' beauty, proudly displaying pictures of it in their living rooms or sending postcards to friends and family. But what was "beautiful" in the eyes of the Berliner, i.e. Moorish monumentality, was presumptuous and inappropriate to the Londoner; what was desirable to Prussian Jews, namely to draw public attention to their presence by building in an utterly foreign architectural style, was undesirable – even nonsensical – to their English counterparts. As we have seen, Victorian Jews considered modest, familiar architectural expressions a means to convey respectability and assimilability; blending into the urban landscape meant blending into Victorian society. This strategy would not work for Prussian Jews. They had practiced inconspicuousness many times with only mediocre results. Now that they had attained bourgeois status and had lived up to gentile demands to acculturate, the Jews of Berlin were ready to show their achievements to the public. They did so by constructing the largest synagogue of its time, a bold initiative that directly defies the common claim that passivity and timidity were the primary characteristics of nineteenth-century Prussian Jewry.

That the project contained an overt political dimension became clear before the first stone was even laid and before Knoblauch had submitted his first designs. In the late 1840s and early 1850s, the *Gemeinde* asked permission to erect a second community

synagogue, a request that involved the city authorities and the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. The correspondence that followed, in which the Jews were granted permission to build, but only in a remote area away from where most Jews resided, revealed an unwillingness on the part of the Berlin authorities to acknowledge a public and a central Jewish presence.<sup>9</sup> After the synagogue was completed, too, the political component remained conspicuous, not merely in the aesthetics of the building, but also in the response of gentile observers. The latter admired and appreciated the architectural sophistication of the synagogue but still considered it a *Fremdkörper*, a foreign body in their city – a sentiment revealed in the language used to describe the building. It was “like a fairy-tale,” exotic, and entirely un-German, confirming for many the inherent foreignness of the Jews.

Before we explore this further, however, let us first turn to the city of Berlin, for its urban and architectural development set the scene in which the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue was constructed.

### **Berlin in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century**

Many observers of Berlin have wondered how this rather shabby garrison town grew to such importance in the history of Prussia and Germany. Its curious location in the swampy areas between the Elbe and Oder rivers and its lack of easy access to a large port rendered it an unlikely candidate to become one of the world’s leading capitals by the late nineteenth century. The rather poor quality of the soil rendered the area unattractive to

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Nathans found a similar response in the case of St. Petersburg. The city authorities were uncomfortable with the prospect of a visually prominent synagogue in the city center and consequently assigned its location to a remote area. See Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter With Late Imperial Russia* (University of California Press, 2004).

large numbers of people. Indeed, the Prussian landscape was so unpromising that the French writer Stendhal (1783-1842) once asked what possibly “could have possessed people to found a city in the middle of all this sand?” In addition to its geographical challenges, Berlin was recurrently weakened by conflict and an unstable economy over the course of its long history. While the ascendancy of the Hohenzollern dynasty in the sixteenth century slowly improved Prussia’s commercial and military status, leading to the transformation of Berlin from a medieval mercantile town to a respectable residence city, it did not alleviate the dramatic fluctuations that caused Berlin to experience glorious highs but also devastating lows. The Thirty Years War, for instance, left the city bankrupt and far removed from greatness. The French revolutionary wars, too, hit Berlin hard as Napoleon demanded high reparations. Compared to neighboring cities, Berlin was a poor, insignificant place in early modern Europe. Its path to maturity, in other words, was rocky as the city “seesawed between triumphalism and defeat.”<sup>10</sup> A history of political instability and military setbacks, as well as the long absence of a cultured class committed to the beautification of its living environment, thus rendered Berlin the very opposite of urban gems like Rome, Prague, and Amsterdam. Even the German nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke admitted that the Germans were the only people to have achieved pre-eminence without having built a great capital.

The built environment attested to the city’s modest status. Confined within its medieval fortifications, Berlin remained for long centered around the *Stadtschloß* and its gardens, the two Christian churches, and the harbor located at the Spree river in the

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<sup>10</sup> For an excellent study of Berlin’s history see Alexandra Richie, *Faust’s Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998). Richie quotes Stendahl on page 1. See also Giles MacDonogh, *Berlin* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997); Anthony Read and David Fisher, *Berlin: A Biography of a City* (London: Hutchinson, 1994); David Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

southern part of the city. It was Frederick I who gave Berlin its first grand, neo-classical buildings in the early eighteenth century, such as the Monbijou Palace and the Arsenal on Unter den Linden, and began to transform the city. Many visitors, however, remained rather unimpressed. The English diplomat Sir Charles Hanbury Williams (1708-1759), for instance, described Berlin as “a very fine and large town but thinly inhabited. It is big enough to contain 300,000 souls and yet without the garrison there is not about 80,000 inhabitants, and among them there is not one at whose house you can dine or sup without a formal invitation; and that is a thing that very seldom happens.”<sup>11</sup> To Williams, who visited Prussia in the mid-eighteenth century, the city was an uninviting place. Others remarked on the pervasive poverty that impressive and dignified new buildings were unable to hide. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) noticed the “narrow nasty streets out of repair, wretchedly thin of inhabitants, and over half of the common sort asking for alms . . . how different from England!”<sup>12</sup> To Montagu, who conveniently ignored the poverty in English cities, Berlin displayed “a sort of shabby finery” that rendered the city immature and undeserving of praise.

While Berlin did not warm the hearts of most visitors, and while the majority of people lived in deplorable conditions, some remarkable improvements had been made over the course of the eighteenth century. Indeed, argues the historian Alexandra Richie, “Berlin had been improved beyond recognition, built from nothing in the midst of a sandy wasteland by a succession of visionary leaders culminating in Frederick the Great.” But manifestations of architectural creativity and aesthetic expertise – witnessed around

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<sup>11</sup> Sir Charles Hanbury Williams was the British envoy to Prussia, but he was recalled to London in 1751 after criticizing Frederick the Great and Berlin in public. This passage is quoted in Nancy Mitford, *Frederick the Great* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 169.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Whamcliffe, *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Montagu* (London : Henry G. Bohn: 1861), 41.

this time at Versailles and Christopher Wren's London – were minimal. Prussian rulers were preoccupied with enhancing the economic and military growth of the state; developing a sophisticated architectural scene that stretched beyond the royal court and that could compete with other European centers was not yet a high priority. Berlin's neo-classical court architecture, with its lack of color and emphasis on order and correctness, reflected the Prussian monarchy's growing fascination with military precision, order, and strength.

By the early nineteenth century, however, Berlin had established itself as an aristocratic and intellectual hub and it consequently attracted a growing number of people. It was, together with Hamburg, the only *Großstadt* in what is today Germany, which meant that it had a population over 100,000. While it was relatively small compared to other European cities – its population of 400,000 in 1841 paled in comparison to that of London, which had surpassed the one and a half million mark ten years earlier – Berlin was beginning to reflect modern demographic patterns. Especially when the forces of industrialization and urbanization began to make inroads, the city took on massive proportions and permanently changed its appearance. Although Prussia experienced a relatively late industrial “take-off” and a delayed urbanization – the years just before unification are often identified as the beginning of German expansion – both were extremely rapid and intense.<sup>13</sup> The 1834 *Zollverein*, a new customs bill that created a free trade zone between provinces, had been instrumental in initiating a national economy and in promoting the idea of a national state. By the 1860s, 90 percent of the mining and metal production was centered in Berlin, as was 60 percent of heavy industry

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<sup>13</sup> See Brian Ladd, *Urban Planning and Civic Order in Germany, 1860-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 13.

and almost the entire textile manufacturing of Germany. Local Jews benefited in particular from the latter, as many were involved in the manufacturing and sale of textiles. By mid-century the population of Berlin had expanded to 500,000 (from 170,000 in 1800) and by the late 1870s it surpassed one million.<sup>14</sup> Some two million residents (including approximately 100,000 Jews) called the German capital their home by the turn of the century, a number that would again double by the 1920s. By the interwar period, Berlin had grown into one of the largest cities in the world.

These changes had a profound effect on the urban landscape. In addition to Karl Friedrich Schinkel's works earlier in the century, such as the Lustgarten, Unter den Linden, the Platz der Akademie, the Tiergarten, the Schauspielhaus, the Altes Museum (1830), and a number of churches and bridges,<sup>15</sup> a myriad of new business enterprises and office buildings appeared, as well as new universities, applied-arts schools and technical institutes, museums, restaurants and hotels to cater to the needs of a rapidly growing middle class. A system of tramways and urban rail systems, the *Stadtbahn* and the *Ringbahn*, were introduced over the course of the 1870s. And, as elsewhere, Berlin saw the emergence of residential suburbs – also known as *Villenkolonien* – that intensified the separation of work and dwelling place. A number of urban planners developed so-called

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Ladd argues that in Prussia the Industrial Revolution made its first appearance in small towns rather than in urban centers as the former offered coal deposits, water power, or other peculiar advantages that the largest cities lacked. Berlin in 1850 thus remained a *Residenzstadt* or mercantile center with little large-scale industry. Indeed, “its prosperity came at first through powerful merchants who promoted and exploited industrial development elsewhere.” Only after 1860, writes Ladd, did urban social and economic structures change very rapidly. See Ladd, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Schinkel (1781-1840) was the one of the greatest German architects of the nineteenth century. A private architect for the Prussian royal family, he was unusually productive and highly influential in the development of central Berlin. While he had a personal fondness for Gothic architecture, he worked in a wide variety of styles, from Romanesque and Byzantine to Renaissance and Egyptian forms. For more on Schinkel see, among others, Julius Posener, “Schinkel’s Eclecticism and ‘the Architectural,’” in Doug Clelland (ed.), *Berlin: An Architectural History* (London: Architectural Design, 1983), 33-39; Eva Börsch-Supan, *Berliner Baukunst nach Schinkel: 1840-1870* (München, Prestel, 1977); Mario Alexander Zadow, *Karl Friedrich Schinkel: Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 2003).

*Mietskaserne*, large tenement blocks that were supposed to function as small villages, where people of mixed incomes and status would live together in harmony. James Hobrecht, who was the chief of municipal building in Berlin in the 1860s, was one such urban planner who envisioned an integrated form of urban development. The *Mietkasernen* and *Villenkolonien* were to resemble German society as a whole and to avoid the modern tendency to segregate on the basis of class – something Hobrecht believed was particularly troubling in the case of England. In his essay “Concerning Public Health,” he contrasted his philosophy to that of his English colleagues:

It is known that our way of life stands on an opposite principle to that of the English way of living . . . In English towns, situated close together, there are villas and single houses of the wealthy classes to be found in the western areas and elsewhere, while in the other districts of town the houses of the poorer population are to be found, put together in groups according to the fortunes of the owners; complete districts of cities are inhabited by the working population . . . Not “seclusion” but “integration” seems to me requisite for ethical and therefore political reasons.<sup>16</sup>

Erecting socio-economically mixed tenement blocks, in which poor families on the fourth floor would share the same entrance as the better-off on the first floor, would make Berlin a model for a modern but socially responsible city – one that would stimulate a more egalitarian *Gemeinschaft*. That such ideals rarely come to fruition, however, is an unfortunate reality and, as in many other major urban centers, the newly-constructed tenements soon turned into ill-maintained and dismal housing for the less fortunate.

Hobrecht’s idealism grew out of the public health movement, which gained ground in the 1870s as the negative side effects of industrialization and population growth became apparent and as cities elsewhere drew public attention to the dangers of people lacking *Licht und Luft*. City planning was only one branch in which a greater

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<sup>16</sup> James Hobrecht is quoted in Doug Clelland (ed.), *Berlin: An Architectural History*, 11.

concern for health and sanitation became an influential component,<sup>17</sup> but it was by far the most visible. Hospitals, public parks, drainage and sewage systems, and wider streets to battle congestion slowly began to transform the urban landscape and reflected the municipality's desire to create an orderly living environment. In 1873, for instance, the city government initiated plans to establish a central water supply after it purchased the private company that had for long controlled the distribution of water. However, it took many years for these urban reforms to be implemented and to take effect, especially as the power of the municipal government was relatively weak compared to that of influential property owners. Private interests often obstructed public initiatives, something that was painfully clear to Edwin Chadwick, who visited the capital in the early 1870s. He still found Berlin one of the foulest smelling places in Europe and claimed Berliners revealed their identity instantly when traveling by the smell of their attire.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, for a long time there was a gap in Berlin between a growing interest in city planning and public policy – in part inspired by foreign examples, such as Baron Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris – and practical change. While publications such as Reinhard Baumeister's *Stadt-Erweiterungen in technischer, baupolizeilicher und wirtschaftlicher Beziehung* (1876) suggested new methods in dealing responsibly with Berlin's expansion, and while new organizations such as the *Deutscher Verein für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* (1873) and the *Verein für Gesundheitstechnik* reflected the

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<sup>17</sup> For more on the relationship between Jewish rituals and public health see Robin Judd, *Contested rituals: Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843-1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Chadwick is quoted by Ladd, 50. The fact that some women in Berlin, adds Ladd, still earned a living by carrying buckets from latrines to the Spree river in the middle of the night, and that parts of the city still had open gutters, certainly explains why Chadwick encountered unpleasant odors during his strolls.



desire among professionals to improve modern city life for the masses, progress was slow. In this respect Berlin and Amsterdam shared characteristics, as both were comparatively late in initiating and regulating urban development.

### ***In Welchem Style Sollen Wir Bauen? Berlin's Architectural Scene***

When Berlin became a world city in the second half of the nineteenth century, the question “in what style should we build?” was already a few decades old. It was first posed by Heinrich Hübsch (1795-1863), who published a book with this very title in 1828.<sup>19</sup> Hübsch, who considered architecture the mother of fine arts, sparked a public debate that centered on the creation of a German national style, a new architectural authority. Now that the time of French political and aesthetic imperialism was over, it was claimed, architects should find an artistic expression that best suited the German landscape, climate, and national character. “We should strive,” wrote Rudolf Wiegmann in response to Hübsch’s questions, “to attain a living art that faithfully reflects and is nourished by the character of our own time. [We need] an art to express the character of the present, which might be described as lacking in independence. To attain this independence and to transform and shape the age is now the supreme duty of an artist, nay of a man.”<sup>20</sup> But what kind of shape should this independent German architecture take and what was it supposed to express?

The question of style and of “*Was ist deutsch?*” was complicated by the fact that the building profession was in transformation. Indeed, contends the architectural historian Mitchell Schwarzer, in no prior era had architectural theorists been confronted with so

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<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Hübsch, *In welchem Style sollen wir bauen?* (Karlsruhe: Müller, 1828).

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Wiegmann, “Bemerkungen über die Schrift: In welchem Style sollen wir bauen? von H. Hübsch,” *Kunst-Blatt* 10:44 (1829): 173-74; 177-79; 181-83.

many rapid and dramatic changes to the practice of building.<sup>21</sup> New techniques, the availability of new construction materials, and a high demand for professional builders and architects presented the latter with a wide array of possibilities, from Biedermeier classicism to Gothic romanticism to the Italian renaissance and more. This artistic multilingualism – or as the architect Eduard Metzger referred to it, this “second Babel” – was exciting, but it also brought uncertainty about the norms of the discipline and the construction of a collective identity. Aesthetic pluralism complicated the efforts of finding “a style of our own time,” one that harmonized the traditional values of the German *Gemeinschaft* with the new virtues of the *Gesellschaft*, the moral values of an “authentic” German community with the structural-economic virtues of modern society. The result was an intense, decades-long debate in the *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* and the *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen*.

To the architect Carl Albert Rosenthal, for instance, the Gothic style was the most appropriate national aesthetic. “The Germanic, i.e. Gothic, style,” he argued, “is closer to us in time, national character and religion . . . It may even be that this style was almost invented for us and for those who follow us. This would also explain why medieval buildings are still so much alive and why many things in medieval architecture strike a familiar cord with us.”<sup>22</sup> Medievalists like Rosenthal regarded the Gothic form as a source of spiritual renewal at a time when religion seemed threatened by modernity. The adoption of a Gothic style would reintroduce authentic Christian values into the urban

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, argues Schwarzer, “the harmonization of architects’ premodern and modern identities would be one of the greatest sources of conflict during the nineteenth century. It posed a potentially irresolvable question: how could architectural theorists adapt the premodern, aristocratic identity of architecture to a modern world increasingly dominated by the cultural values of the industrial middle class?” Mitchell Schwarz, *German Architectural Theory and the Search for Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Albert Rosenthal, “In welchem Style sollen wir bauen? (Eine Frage für die Mitglieder des deutschen Architektenvereins),” *Zeitschrift für praktische Baukunst* 4 (1844): 23-27.

landscape, serving as a beacon of stability in a world full of uncertainties and temptations. These sentiments resembled those expressed by British and Dutch architectural theorists during the mid-nineteenth century, such as A. W. N. Pugin, whose *Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture* maintained that Gothic constituted the salvation of the present and the renewal of the Christian state.

Others, however, rejected Rosenthal's rhetoric of Gothic "destiny" and advocated instead a return to the classical orders in architecture. The aesthetic rationality of Greek design, they maintained, rendered the classical style highly appropriate for the modern age. It was timeless, dignified, and a symbol for an ideal society based on reason, power, and a strong sense of shared identity. These so-called revivalists, such as Johann Winckelmann, Aloys Hirt, and Leo von Klenze, regarded the classical style as the most suitable self-expression of the German nation.

A third cluster of architectural theorists in the mid-nineteenth century, the eclectics, rejected the appropriation of past styles. They argued that only a new synthesis of historical styles could form a true expression of the complexities of the modern age.<sup>23</sup> The style of today could not be a simple revival of the past as it denied the progress of history and the altered socio-economic, political, and cultural forces that shaped modern life. New times demanded a new artistic expression, one that fused previous aesthetic idioms into something innovative and unique.

As elsewhere in northern Europe, the notion of style was thus closely linked to a particular set of values and to what was vaguely called "character."<sup>24</sup> Gothic was intricately linked to Christian morals, Greek classicism was associated with secular

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<sup>23</sup> Mari Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152.

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 3, note 26.

rationalism, citizenship, and noble political principles, while oriental architecture – as we shall see below – carried with it notions of leisure, pleasure, fantasy, even irresponsibility.<sup>25</sup> According to Mari Hvattum, these categories point to a shift in the notion of style among architects and the wider public. Whereas in the eighteenth century “style” was understood as a variation on one classical model, in the nineteenth century, when the universalism of classicism was eroding, each style became an architectural language in itself, symbolizing certain ideological principles and goals. “Whereas [previously] style presupposed a given language from which one could draw,” she writes,

nineteenth-century architects saw each style as a language in itself – that is, an autonomous system of meaning with its own particular logic. Different historical styles were conceived as different but analogous systems, each corresponding to a particular set of values. Moreover, these systems were regarded not only as passive impressions of past civilizations, but also as didactic tools for the formation of the present. The demand for a ‘style of our time,’ then, aspired not only to represent the present but also to form it; the dilemma of style, consequently, became a dilemma of moral ideals and how to emulate them.

Style, in other words, became a matter of choice, but a choice that carried great responsibility and that contained a clear ideological component – either the ideal of rationality (Hübisch’s classicism), of religious morality (medieval Gothic), of *völkisch* belonging (German renaissance), or of contemporary pluralism and individualism (eclecticism). In Prussia, too, the nineteenth-century “battle of styles” thus revolved around more than aesthetic preferences; it reflected a power struggle over the definition and representation of German national character.

Discussions centering on oriental architecture were conspicuously absent among German theorists. While oriental-style buildings had emerged in the German lands – King Wilhelm’s royal palace “Wilhelma” in Württemberg (1852) contained oriental

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<sup>25</sup> On the architectural theories of nineteenth-century Germany see, among others, Klaus Döhmer, “*In welchem Style sollen wir bauen?*” *Architekturtheorie zwischen Klassizismus und Jugendstil* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1976); Cornelius Gurlitt, *Zur Befreiung der Baukunst: Ziele und Taten deutscher Architekten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Bertelmann Fachverlag, 1969); Wolfgang Herrmann, *Deutsche Baukunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1977).

features, as did some coffee and bath houses – they were few in number. It was a genre that did not enjoy a particularly high regard among architects and art critics and it was therefore excluded from the conversation over a national style. When the topic of oriental forms did surface, it served to highlight its foreignness and to reinforce the “Germanness” of other styles. Oriental architecture carried connotations of pleasure, of secularism, of *Lustbarkeit* [revelry], and amusement rather than edification, religious piety, and authenticity. While exotic and intriguing, to many architectural theorists it displayed precisely those qualities that explained the East’s “inferiority” to the West, that of passivity, languor, and leisure. The Moorish style, as a variation of Eastern architecture, appeared at a time when the desire for a clear definition of what was German and what was not became very strong, and Moorish designs clearly belonged in the latter category. “Apart from its lack of the Christian element,” scoffed Rosenthal, “the style has one fault that prevents it from being recommended for general approval: an almost total disregard for the symbolic expression of structural forces; that is, the lack of architectonic character . . . [It] is confined to pure decoration. The style is charming, although never more than a lively play of fancy.”<sup>26</sup> Carl Gottlieb Wilhelm Boetticher, a professor of architecture at the *Bauakademie* in Berlin, agreed. In an 1846 lecture he argued that “Arabs incorporated into their phantasmagoric art only the spaciousness that gratified their pursuit of enjoyment” and that they “overlaid their buildings with an opulent but meaningless coating.”<sup>27</sup> What was considered playful in Britain, an expression of its imperial relationship with the East, was seen as highly foreign in German culture.

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<sup>26</sup> Rosenthal, *Zeitschrift für praktische Baukunst*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Carl Gottlieb Wilhelm Boetticher, “Das Prinzip der hellenischen und germanischen Bauweise hinsichtlich der Uebertragung in die Bauweise unserer Tage,” *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* 11 (1846): 111-25.

Moreover, from the 1850s onwards, oriental architecture became increasingly associated with synagogues. A growing number of Jewish communities in central Europe began building houses of worship with distinctive neo-Islamic features. Alfred Woltmann acknowledged in his *Baugeschichte Berlin bis auf die Gegenwart* (Building History of Berlin until the Present, 1872) that it had become “common practice to build synagogues in the Arabic style.” The *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, too, typified Moorish architecture as a “specifically Jewish” style.<sup>28</sup> Gottfried Semper (1803-1879), a Protestant architect, was the first to design a synagogue in this fashion. Semper, who had participated in the 1830 revolution in France but had returned to accept the position of professor of architecture at the *Bauschule* in Dresden, accepted the challenge in the late 1830s. He did so, argues Harold Hammer Schenk, in part for political reasons. A sympathizer with the politically disadvantaged, he designed a Moorish-Romanesque building that “pointed to the possibilities but not the realities for the Jews, namely full integration in a Christian world.” The building form was to be visual proof of “what might be” and “an active contributor to making equality visible in the public sphere.”<sup>29</sup> The Dresden synagogue would be a sign of freedom – a freedom Jews hoped for but did not yet enjoy.

Ironically, it was mostly Christian architects who designed Moorish synagogues, while their Jewish colleagues – who came to the profession late due to legal restrictions and discrimination – passionately opposed it. The latter were generally ambitious men who strived for professional recognition and they consequently avoided distinguishing

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<sup>28</sup> “Der Stil des Ganzen [Or. Synagoge] ist der, in neuerer Zeit ja als der spezifisch jüdische bei den meisten Synagogenbauten zur Anwendung gebrachte, arabische” [1867]. The *Bauzeitung* is quoted in Harold Hammer-Schenk, *Synagogen in Deutschland. Geschichte einer Baugattung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert – 1780-1933, Tl. I* (Hamburg: Christians, 1981), 48.

<sup>29</sup> For more on Gottfried Semper see Harold Hammer-Schenk, “Die Architektur der Synagoge von 1780 bis 1933,” in Hans-Peter Schwarz (ed.), *Die Architektur der Synagoge* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988): 157-286. According to Hammer-Schenk, the Orient represented an escape, “a place of yearning of an imagined freedom . . . [oriental architecture] offered people freedom that was not a reality in daily life.”

themselves by specializing in un-German design. The Jewish architect Albert Rosengarten (1809-1893), for instance, vehemently argued against Moorish architecture.<sup>30</sup> His Romanesque-inspired proposal for a synagogue in Kassel featured “classically German” patterns, which Rosengarten believed alone would have a “solemn and uplifting effect on the mind.”<sup>31</sup> Edwin Oppler (1831-1880), who, together with Rosengarten, was one of the first Jewish architects to specialize in synagogues, had similar convictions. He designed, among others, the synagogues of Hannover (1870), Breslau (1872), and Karlsbad (1877) in a transitional, late-Romanesque to early-Gothic style to express the German patriotism of the Jews. Oppler was convinced that a “German Jew in the German state should build in a German style” and that the familiarity of a *Rundbogenstil* building would promote Jewish integration.<sup>32</sup> After all, he wrote,

The German Jew wants above all to be German; he struggles and suffers for equality to his Christian brothers; should his house of worship then isolate him? Should he let character traits and sentiments be ascribed to him that in no way contribute to his elevation in the eyes of his fellow man, solely due to the adoption of a Moorish style? When erecting a synagogue, the aim is to establish a beautiful as well as a national building, a requirement if it wants to become monumental. Buildings dedicated to God can and should only be monumental.

For German Jews to be associated with the “character traits” of peoples from the East was in Oppler’s mind damaging to their image and objectives. Rather than a legitimate expression of loyalty to the fatherland, Moorish architecture had instead a separating function, reaffirming the foreignness of the Jews and their connection to a different nation. Indeed, if Judaism was to survive the forces of modernization, it had to be in

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<sup>30</sup> Saskia Rohde, “Albert Rosengarten (1809-1893): Die Anfänge des Synagogenbaus jüdischer Architekten in Deutschland,” *Menora: Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdische Geschichte* (München: Piper, 1993), 228-258.

<sup>31</sup> Rosengarten is quoted in Brian de Breffny’s *The Synagogue* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), 175.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Edwin Oppler’s life and career see Helmut Zimmermann, “Edwin Oppler,” in *Leben und Schicksal. Zur Einweihung der Synagoge in Hannover* (Hannover, 1963); Harold Hammer-Schenk, “Edwin Opplers Theorie des Synagogenbaus. Emanzipationsversuche durch Architektur,” *Hannoversche Zeitung* (1979): 101-117; Saskia Rohde, “Im Zeichen der Hannoverschen Architekturschule: Der Architekt Edwin Oppler (1831-1880) und seine schlesische Bauten,” *Hannoversche Zeitung* (2000): 67-86.

dialogue with the surrounding culture. Building a Romanesque synagogue, a style that emphasized “strength, earnestness, and repose,” would be a more truthful expression of the Jews’ character and of modern Judaism. Oppler thus sought the complete adaptation of the synagogue to German vernacular architecture. He searched for a German national style, not a Jewish one, and he found it in the Romanesque, which he considered “German through and through.”<sup>33</sup>

If the Moorish style had less than favorable connotations among professional architects, then the question of why it became so popular among urban Jews in central Europe becomes pertinent. German-Jewish architects might have objected to its application, but a growing number of building committees and community members across central Europe, including Berlin, gave their enthusiastic consent to Moorish-inspired designs. Some scholars have suggested that the neo-Islamic style gained appeal due to its connection to the “wonderful flowering of Judaic culture under the Moslem caliphate” in medieval Spain, which was held in high regard in the nineteenth-century.<sup>34</sup> Others, however, have rejected this explanation and rooted its popularity instead in the fascination of Europe at large with things Oriental. Whatever its precise origins, there is a

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<sup>33</sup> “Die bislang angeführten neuen Synagogen sind größtenteils im maurischen Style erbaut. Dieser Style hat auch nicht die geringste Beziehung zum Judenthum; ich meinestheils spreche ihm jede Berechtigung, zu solchen Bauwerken verwandt zu werden, ab und habe deshalb den Entwurf im Style des zwölften Jahrhunderts gezeichnet. Warum soll eine deutsche Juden-Gemeinde ihr Gotteshaus nicht im deutschen Style aufführen? Das Gotteshaus soll den späteren Geschlechtern Rechenschaft ablegen, von der Geistesstufe, auf welcher damals die Gemeinde stand. Geschieht dieses, wenn man das Gebäude in einem Style aufführt, der uns in die Zeiten des Islam versetzt und even deshalb nur Anwendung findet, weil er so und so oft in unserem Jahrhundert zur Anwendung gekommen ist? . . . Der romanische Styl ist durch und durch deutsch, unser Land trägt schon Denkmäler dieser Kunst, seine Constructionsweise ist für unser Material geeignet. Der Rundbogen ist das Sinnbild der Kraft und des Ernstes und der Ruhe. Darum wählte ich diesen Styl.” Oppler is quoted in Harold Hammer-Schenk, “Edwin Oppler’s Theorie des Synagogenbaus. Emanzipationsversuch durch Architektur,” *Hannoversche Gechichtsblätter* (1979): 99-117. Oppler could not build in the Gothic style, the ultimate expression of German national consciousness, as this was considered inappropriate both by Jews and non-Jews due to its Christian connotations.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Brian de Breffny, *The Synagogue*, 159; Dominique Jarrasse, “*Sefarad* Imaginaire: Le Style Hispano-Mauresque dans les Synagogues Françaises du XIXe Siecle,” in Esther Benbassa (ed.), *Mémoires Juives d’Espagnes et du Portugal* (1996), 261-269.



consensus that the Moorish phenomenon is directly related to the Jews' soaring confidence and optimism about their socio-economic and political progress, which caused them to see no harm in publicly announcing their non-European origins. The 1860s and 1870s, after all, were a time of growing liberalism, so the argument goes, and the majority of Jews had faith in their fellow man's acceptance of religious diversity. Consequently, Jews adopted an oriental style in order to demonstrate their ethnic and religious individuality. It became a means to display a growing Jewish self-awareness, emancipation, an authentic "Jewish *Kultbau*."<sup>35</sup> One observer even described Moorish synagogues as living symbols of a Jewish national revival and misleadingly linked them to the rise of Zionism.<sup>36</sup>

While most of these suggestions have some value, they require nuance. We cannot assume that Moorish-inspired synagogues emerged due to identical motives or that the oriental style generated similar sentiments among the Jewish and gentile residents of Berlin, Paris, New York, Cincinnati, and St. Petersburg alike. These monumental buildings might indeed have been "symbols of emancipation" in France and Italy, as Dominique Jarrassé and Scott Lerner have maintained, but it would be a simplification to

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<sup>35</sup> See, among others, Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architectur of the European Synagogue*, 217; Dominique Jarrassé, *Synagogues: Architecture and Jewish Identity* (Paris: Vilo International, 2001), 193; Carol Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*, 270; Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture," *Jewish Social Studies* 7: 3 (2001), 68-100; Marc Grellert, "Architecture as a Social Seismograph: Insights into the History of Jewish Religious Architecture, in *Synagogues in Germany: A Virtual Reconstruction* (Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Jarrassé directly links oriental architecture to Zionism by explaining the former as an expression of a Jewish national identity, which is problematic for two reasons. First, oriental synagogues architecture was a pre-Zionist phenomenon. Secondly, the majority of west-European bourgeois Jews, including those who built oriental synagogues, were not Zionists. They were eager to proclaim their national loyalty to the country in which they resided, not to the land of Israel. While it is true that the last quarter of the century witnessed a growth in the Zionist cause – largely as a response to rising antisemitism – it would be incorrect to define the Jews' interest in things oriental as their attempt to "forge a national identity." By constructing a monumental Moorish building, Jews tried to publicly explain their religious identity, but their national allegiance was never in question. Jarrassé, "Orientalism: from Temple to Semitism," in *Synagogues: Architecture and Jewish Identity*, 173-196.

make the same argument with respect to 1860s Prussia, where civil equality was still undecided and a topic of hot debate. Optimism and confidence were counterbalanced by expressions of frustration and by calls for a proactive stance to push the emancipation debate forward. Moreover, just as many Romanesque synagogues appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century as did Moorish ones. While the latter design was popular, it was not the dominant style for German synagogues. Were Jews who chose a monumental house of worship according to a Romanesque design less confident or optimistic? Size, location, and interior lay-out appear to say more about contemporary attitudes than style. We should also be careful with associating Moorish architecture with liberalism. An analysis of Amsterdam, where the Jews lived in a very liberal climate but where Moorish architecture was virtually absent, has shown that liberalism, Jewish confidence, and monumental Moorish synagogues were not necessarily linked. Where an oriental design did become fashionable, it served different objectives depending on the context in which it emerged.

With regard to Prussia, the application of oriental architecture grew out of the desire – on the part of gentile architects as well as Jewish building committee members – to give Jewish *Kultbau* its own character, completely separate from sacred Christian architecture and from secular styles. What Gothic churches were to Christians was what Moorish synagogues were to be for Jews. And precisely because an exclusively oriental flavor would communicate the wrong message, they moderated its foreignness by integrating vernacular elements, such as narrow *Rundbogen*-style windows and perfect symmetry. The aesthetic composition of the Oranienburgerstraße building and that of other German synagogues was an eclectic mixture of Romanesque, *Rundbogenstil*, and

Byzantine patterns with strong Moorish overtones, which suggests that Jews were trying to find their own stylistic identity while at the same time professing their firm connection to Germany, their membership to both “Mutter Deutschland und Vater Israel.”<sup>37</sup> The introduction of a Jewish aesthetic thus announced the liberation from western traditions and the development of a distinct style, but also the incorporation of elements of recognition. More importantly, it suggests that both the architect and his clients considered the Jewish minority population as having a distinct character, a different set of values, which deserved its own expression.

For a number of gentile architects, however, the perception of a distinct “Jewish character” extended far beyond the religious domain. Whereas Jewish officials considered their faith the only characteristic that set them apart from their Christian neighbors, legitimizing the adoption of a foreign aesthetic for a community synagogue, the architects who designed these buildings often viewed the Jews themselves as different. The architect Otto Simonson, for instance, stated that he chose a Moorish design for a synagogue in Leipzig because

the Moorish style appeared as the most characteristic. *Das Judenthum* adheres with unshakable piety to its history: its laws, habits and customs, the organization of its body, almost its entire being lives in reminiscence of the mother land, the orient. The architect has to keep this in mind if he wants to give the building its own identity [*Stempel*], but he'll have plenty of liberty if he understands how to pick skillfully the right flower out of the oriental bouquet. If he does not lapse into lifeless imitation, but wisely gathers the available patterns he will create a new harmony in the spirit of contemporary requirements. He will then be able to enjoy a work that appears alien to him, but that will find friendly acceptance among the strangers.<sup>38</sup>

For Simonson, the Jews were second-class citizens and they therefore deserved, even required, a foreign architectural style. Contextualization is critical here. In mid to late-

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<sup>37</sup> At the consecration of a new synagogue in Frankfurt in 1860, the rabbi, in his inaugural address, stated the building expressed the Jews' membership both of “Mutter Deutschland” and of “Vater Israel.” See Frederic Bedoire, *The Jewish Contribution to Modern Architecture, 1830-1930* (Stockholm: KTAV Publishing House, 2004), 141.

<sup>38</sup> Simonson is quoted in H. Hammer-Schenk, “Die Architektur der Synagoge von 1780 bis 1933,” in *Die Architektur der Synagoge*, edited by Hans-Peter Schwartz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988): 203.

nineteenth century Germany, building in a distinct style conveyed a message to the public, either about your Christian values, your national identity, or your belief in cosmopolitan diversity. It did not, however, annotate this message with specifications as to which part of your identity these aesthetic values applied. The result was a communicative gap between Jews and gentiles. For the latter, Moorish synagogues represented the inherent foreignness of the Jews, while for many Jews they reflected the non-Western origins of their faith, but of their faith alone. Their denomination might be Jewish, but in any other sense Berlin Jews considered themselves as much German as anyone else. While the emergence of Moorish houses of worship thus pointed to a greater sense of artistic independence on the part of Jewish communities, in the larger context it did not help their cause as these buildings functioned as a constant reminder of their un-Germanness. Especially in the 1880s and 90s, when antisemitic discourse had become prevalent, the Oranienburgerstraße building as well as other Moorish-inspired synagogues were easy “proof” of the Jews’ loyalty to a homeland [*Heimat*] other than that of Germany. When Paul de Lagarde criticized the Jews’ “claim” to German citizenship, he used the Berlin structure as an obvious example to negate it: “Through the style of their synagogue, the Jews emphasize [their] alien nature every day in the most obvious manner, though they wish nevertheless to enjoy equality with the Germans. What does it mean to claim a right to the honorable title of a German, while building your most holy sites in the Moorish style, so that no one can forget that you are a Semite, an Asian, an alien?”<sup>39</sup> The particular association of Jews with Moorish design accentuated and perpetuated their difference from their surroundings; it acted as an exclusionary rather

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Lagarde, “Die Stellung der Religionsgesellschaften im Staate [the Position of Religious Communities in the State]” (Feb. 1881), in Simon Hermann, *The New Synagogue, Berlin: Past - Present - Future* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1992), 10.

than an integrative agent. In Germany, then, – and increasingly so in Imperial Germany – there was a gap between the Jews’ artistic intention and the wider public’s interpretation, between the signifier and the signified. As we shall see in further detail below, a segment of the German population continued to have difficulty accepting the message of monumental synagogues, namely that the Jews were participating and contributing to a culture that was as much theirs as any other and that they differed solely from other Germans in their religious preference.

The question “in what style should we build” and the debate over a German national architecture intensified during the 1860s, when the movement toward unification reinvigorated the question of who and what belonged and did not belong to the *Heimat* – precisely at the time when the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue was under construction. Before turning to its building history, however, let us first examine the community for whom it was built.

### **The Jewish Community in Berlin**

Compared to the communities of Amsterdam and London, the Jewish *Gemeinde* of Berlin was relatively small in number in the mid-nineteenth century. According to German and Dutch periodicals, which occasionally published census records, 6,456 Jews lived in Berlin in 1840 (1.96 percent of the city population), a number that grew to 12,675 (2.9 percent) in 1855 and to 18,953 in 1861 (3.46 percent). Five years later, the year the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue was inaugurated, some 28,000 Jews called Berlin their home. Between 1866 and 1890, roughly 45,000 more Jews settled in the Prussian capital, reflecting the intense urbanization that characterized and permanently

altered German society in the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> The majority of these Jews were active in commerce, finance, industry, and trade. They were overrepresented in textile manufacturing, a branch of industry that benefited from post-1870s industrialization. By 1861, 66.3 percent of Prussian Jews were self-employed (incl. 44.6 percent in trade and commerce, 11.6 percent in craft trades, 2.9 percent in the free professions) and more than 27 percent were employees (incl. 12.4 percent in trade and commerce).<sup>41</sup>

Most Jews lived in Spandauer Vorstadt, an area that today is known as Berlin Mitte (fig. 1). The most densely populated section was the north-west half of the district (Marienkirche parish) where 24.9 percent of the residents was Jewish in 1867.<sup>42</sup> Berlin Mitte had been a Jewish residential area since the early 1700s and it remained so until the 1880s, after which the upper middle class (many of whom were bankers, physicians, and lawyers) began to move to the nearby Spandauer and Stralauer Viertel, to Luisenstadt, Königstadt, and Friedrichstradt. While a moderate segment of the well-to-do had left Mitte for better neighborhoods in the 1840s and 50s, causing the percentage of residents to decline, practically all Jewish migrants who moved to Berlin settled in the Jewish neighborhood. This meant that by mid-century many more Jews lived in Mitte than in earlier decades. It also meant that the population of Mitte was still economically mixed when construction of the new synagogue began in 1859 (fig. 2). According to the Berlin

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<sup>40</sup> For demographic data on Berlin Jewry see, for instance, “Buitenlands Nieuws,” *Israëlietische Nieuwsbode* 5: 32 (February 6, 1880). These numbers were copied, stated the Dutch-Jewish newspaper, from the *Vossische Zeitung*; Hammer-Schenk, “Die Architektur der Synagoge von 1780 bis 1933,” 205.

<sup>41</sup> For more data on Prussian Jewry’s occupational structure see Avraham Barkai, “Jews at the Start of Industrialization: Structural Change and Mobility, 1835-1860,” in Werner E. Mosse, Arnold Pauker, and Reinhard Rürup (eds.), *Revolution and Evolution 1848 in German-Jewish History* (Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr, 1981), 125-131.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Lowenstein, “Jewish Residential Concentration in Post-Emancipation Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 18 (1983): 478.

street registry, the Oranienburgerstraße accommodated carpenters, tailors, a dairyman, a clockmaker, a barber, merchants, bankers, pharmacists, medical doctors, and *Rentiers*, or gentlemen of leisure – both Jews and non-Jews.<sup>43</sup> At number 69 lived one Prof. Dr. Mätzner as well as a book binder named Jacobi, a tailor named Gerhardt, and a teacher named Ms. von Pape. As the population continued to grow, the Jewish neighborhood began to expand to the north and west into Alt Kölln, Spandauer Viertel, Stralauer Viertel, and Königstadt. In 1867, 68.7 percent of the Berlin Jewish population lived in the expanded neighborhood. The percentage of Jews in the Mitte area continued to fall in the 1870s and 1880s, but the absolute numbers of Jews more than doubled, from 18,473 in 1867 to 40,498 in 1890.<sup>44</sup>

Practically all Jewish institutions, from synagogues, schools, and cemeteries to the bet midrash and mikvaot, remained concentrated in Mitte. Indeed, argues Steven Lowenstein, while “there had been some dispersal of the Jewish population, there had been virtually no dispersal of Jewish institutional life.”<sup>45</sup> These patterns are surprisingly similar to those of Amsterdam. In both cities the old neighborhood remained the center of Jewish life. Residential cohesion remained strong; most Jews continued to live among other Jews and when they did move, they left for neighboring districts. In 1867 over 80 percent of the Jews in the western sections of Berlin lived in the western parts of the central city area; only 1,106 Jews lived in the outlying western areas to the north and south of Tiergarten bordering on the suburbs of Charlottenburg. Only late in the century

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<sup>43</sup> Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin: Nachweis Häuser nach Straßen, O Eintrag Nr. 1 (1859), 106-107.

<sup>44</sup> Lowenstein shows that the percentage of Jews living in Alt Berlin fell from 67percent to 51.1percent between 1867 and 1890, but that the absolute numbers increased considerably.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 478. Lowenstein shows that the number of Jews in the west of Berlin increased from 5,537 in 1867 (19percent of Berlin Jews) to 19,890 in 1890 (25percent). By 1890 close to 60percent of the Jews in the western parts of the city (12,146) lived in the far western districts . . . the combined Jewish population of Schöneberg, Charlottenburg, and Wilmersdorf reached 13,684 in 1900 and 26,830 in 1905. By the twentieth century Berlin’s main Jewish neighborhood had begun to relocate to the west.

did Jews settle in distant and overwhelmingly Christian areas, such as Wilmersdorf, Schöneberg, and Charlottenburg, where new synagogues were built. Demographic dispersion in Berlin was thus slow, far slower than the social, cultural, and economic transformations that permanently altered Jewish life.

Residents in Mitte were surrounded by Jewish sights and sounds, from religious and secular institutions, to bakeries, butchers, and bookstores. When visitors strolled through the area in the 1860s, they passed the first community synagogue in the Heidereutergasse, the old cemetery in the Hamburgerstraße (on property given to the community in 1672 by one of the first immigrants from Vienna), the Jewish hospital at Auguststraße 14-16, the orphanage for boys at Rosenstraße 12 (which moved a few streets down to the Oranienburgerstraße 38 in the late 1850s) and the orphanage for girls a few doors down. This observer would also catch sight of M. Poppelauer's Hebrew book store (the first one in Berlin), the Jewish publishing house of Hirsch Itzkowski in the Große Hamburgerstraße near the Jewish Free School, the rabbinical seminary, and the home for the elderly at number 26. Somewhat later in the century, the well-known brothers Wertheim built a large department store a few streets down, in the Rosenthaler Straße, an addition to the department store Wertheim near Leipziger Platz and Tietz near Jerusalemer Straße. Our visitor would pass, most likely unknowingly, the small, private, and inconspicuous synagogues, such as *Hevra Shass* in the Neue Friedrichstraße, *Ahavas Sholaum* in the Grenadierstraße, both of which were founded in 1852, and the *hevra Bet Zion* for people living around Rosenthaler Tor, although the last synagogue dated from 1879. The separatist Reform synagogue in the Johannisstraße (1854) probably went unnoticed too as it was not built directly on the street, but of course no one could miss the



new community synagogue in the Oranienburgerstraße. The latter emerged not in a new suburb, as was the case with new synagogues in London, but in the middle of a thriving Jewish center.

The streets in Mitte were not exclusively Jewish; only a few had a Jewish majority and the population was mixed. We can legitimately speak of a Jewish neighborhood, however, as the majority of Jews had lived, worked, and gone to synagogue in this area since the 1670s. Most socialized, as Marion Kaplan has shown, with other Jews, inviting each other into their homes for dinner.<sup>46</sup> This does not mean Berlin Jews did not find entertainment, work, or everyday needs outside of Mitte; they did. But the majority clustered, until the 1880s, around the old neighborhood where Jewish institutional facilities provided the necessities of everyday life. The entire religious and cultural spectrum was thus represented in the immediate area of the new synagogue.

Communal records show that the Berlin *Gemeinde* was comparatively well-off at this time. Many people made a decent living as an *Agent* (a commercial agent), an artisan, a *Fabrikant* (manufacturer), or a *Kaufmann* (a merchant) and contributed to communal revenues. The 1864 *Kassenbestand*, or financial record, states that only 12,503 thaler was spent on the poor, out of a total spending bill of 175,047 thaler, about 7 percent. The communal revenues for that year were 178,513 thaler, which produced a surplus of 3,466 thaler. A similar scenario occurred the following year, when poor relief rose to 20,315 thaler or 11.8 percent of a total expenditure of 172,422 thaler. Again the *Gemeinde* had a

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<sup>46</sup> Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

surplus, this time 3,753 thaler.<sup>47</sup> The rise in financial aid for the poor was caused in part by the growing number of Jews who settled in Berlin, a proportion of whom needed assistance. The percentage spent on poor relief, however, certainly compared to that of the Amsterdam community, was very low. Indeed, according to the annual *Übersicht des Haushalts*, the rise in population benefited rather than depleted communal funds. The number of contributing households, stated its report, had grown from 3,700 in 1861-1862 to 5,000 a few years later, which led to the “gratifying observation” that communal revenues had increased significantly.<sup>48</sup>

Economic well-being brought with it the desire for cultural *embourgeoisement*. Many Jews saw the acquisition of *Bildung*, that ideal of German education and refined self-cultivation, as an entry ticket into the German *Bildungsbürgertum* and they consequently acculturated quite extensively to the prevailing socio-cultural mores and to middle-class patterns of behavior. This meant that the majority of Berlin Jews were virtually indistinguishable from Christians; they adopted fashionable dress codes, visited the same concerts and theaters, and sent their children to German schools – or at least exposed them to a so-called *Lehrer-Bildungs-Anstalt* [a teacher of manners], which the Jewish *Knabenschule* had on staff for young boys.<sup>49</sup> A whole generation of Jewish children received an education, in school as well as at home, that cultivated German norms and values – a necessity if the Jews were ever to be accepted as patriotic citizens.

Indeed, argued Steven Aschheim,

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<sup>47</sup> CAHJP: Jüdische Gemeinde Berlin - D/Be4/122, “Übersicht der Einnahmen und Ausgaben bei der Haupt-Kasse der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin in dem Jahre 1864,” p. 3 and 4; “Übersicht der Einnahmen und Ausgaben bei der Haupt-Kasse der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin in dem Jahre 1865,” p. 4 and 5. The 1864 records show that 88,000 Thaler was disbursed for the construction of the new synagogue, more than seven times the amount that was spent on the poor in that year.

<sup>48</sup> CAHJP: Jüdische Gemeinde Berlin - D/Be4/122, “An die verehrten Mitglieder unserer Gemeinde!” (1866), 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

[b]ecause of the drawn-out nature of the emancipation struggle German Jews were forced to articulate, more than any other western European Jewish community, these standards in programmatic, even ideological, form . . . emancipation in Germany was not conceived in the spirit of natural rights but rather on the basis of a conditional contract: Jewish regeneration in exchange for civic and political rights. The idea of *Bildung* was crucial to this process because it provided the guiding vehicle for that desired regeneration.<sup>50</sup>

Middle-class Jews in Berlin thus created a new self-image, one that negated the old stereotype of the “uncultured” stranger from the ghetto and that instead met the standards of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. This is not to say that they stopped being Jews; they did not. Even when a certain segment of the population renounced its Jewish heritage and converted to Christianity, historians have found, many still distinguished themselves by residential, occupational, and social patterns. It does mean, however, that by the 1860s most Jews considered themselves Germans who happened to be of the Jewish faith.

Inevitably pressure to acculturate bled into the religious domain. Already in the early 1800s tensions between Orthodox and Reform Jews led to intracommunal conflict. When the latter attempted to hold religious services in German at the home of the banker Jacob Herz Beer (1769-1825) in 1815, Jewish leaders reached out to the Prussian authorities to intervene.<sup>51</sup> A few years later, the Prussian king issued an official order that forbade all changes in religious services. A more Protestant-like ceremony, after all, would present an appealing alternative to Orthodox Judaism and make it less likely for

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<sup>50</sup> Steven E. Aschheim, “Between East and West: Reflections on Migration and the Making of German-Jewish Identity, 1800-1880,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 23: 2 (Fall 1989): 77-87. For more on the topic of *Bildung* see Jürgen Kocka and Allen Mitschell (eds.), *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1993); Aleida Assmann, *Arbeit am Nationalen Gedächtnis: Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschen Bildungsidee* (Frankfurt am Main: 1993); George L. Mosse, “Jewish Emancipation between *Bildung* and Respectability,” in Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (eds.), *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), 1-16; Mosse, “Das deutsch-jüdische Bildungsbürgertum,” in Reinhart Koselleck (ed.), *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert, Teil II: Bildungsbürger und Bildungsgewissen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 168-180.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the Jewish Reform movement in Germany, see Michael A. Meyer, “Should and Can an ‘Antiquated’ Religion Become Modern? The Jewish Reform Movement in Germany as Seen by Jews and Christians,” in Wolfgang Beck (ed.), *The Jews in European History* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992), 57-69; Meyer, *A Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Jews to convert to the Christian faith. Reform was therefore a development best nipped in the bud. A second attempt, however, occurred in the mid-1840s, when Sigismund Stern (1812-1867) and Aaron Bernstein (1812-1884) founded the Society for Reform in Judaism, which gave rise to the German Reform movement. It aspired to harmonize Judaism with German culture and consequently promoted prayer in German, mixed seating, and, after 1849, Sabbath services on Sunday. Reform Jews also favored an organ, a mixed choir, uncovered heads, and the denial of a separate messianic future in the Land of Israel. These were far more than cosmetic reforms, and both the Orthodox leadership in Berlin and Jewish communities elsewhere considered them extreme and dangerous. And radical statements like that of the local Reform rabbi Samuel Holdheim (1806-1860), who asserted that “in the era of the Talmud, the Talmud was right; in my era, I am right,”<sup>52</sup> certainly did not improve matters.

Much to the chagrin of *Gemeinde* leaders, the secessionist Reform congregation began building a synagogue in the Johannisstraße (in the Jewish neighborhood) in 1853. Financing this project was apparently no problem as the majority of Reform Jews, according to the *AZdJ*, were prosperous manufacturers and wholesalers.<sup>53</sup> The congregation hired Gustav Stier (1807-1880) to design the building. The following year the congregation inaugurated, on a Sunday afternoon, a modest structure in an eclectic style with *Rundbogen* overtones, with a floor plan in the shape of a cross (fig. 4). Located away from the street on a small plot of land that contained a high fire wall, the synagogue was rather inconspicuous. It featured a white rectangular façade with a central, arched doorway, five similarly shaped windows, each with a small, round window above it. A

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<sup>52</sup> Samuel Holdheim is quoted in Rebigier's *Jewish Berlin*, 25.

<sup>53</sup> See an announcement in the *AZdJ* 18: 39 (September 25, 1854), 495.

wide, circular, and pointed rotunda emerged above the façade, topped with a [term for needle-like ornament]. None of the exterior features, however, marked it as a Jewish building. The architect had, according to Harold Hammer-Schenk, adopted the dominant characteristics of Schinkel's religious architecture, which included classical, Italian renaissance, and Romanesque elements, avoiding any form of Jewish symbolism. One commentator in the *AZdJ* apparently approved of this approach as he spoke of the synagogue's "utmost elegance." Its exterior displayed an "advanced architecture" while the interior "announced an advanced Cultus."<sup>54</sup>

The interior indeed clearly reflected the preferences of a Reform community. Male and female congregants entered through one and the same entrance and gathered in a small vestibule before stepping into the main prayer room. They sat together in fixed pews facing the lectern and the ark, both of which were combined, podium-like, on the eastern side of the building. An organ was proudly displayed in the background. The Johannisstraße synagogue embodied the outlook of Berlin's Reform Jews: its exterior was sophisticated and religiously neutral – German – while the interior signaled a modern Judaism in harmony with contemporary (Christian) notions of decorum.

The Reform congregation remained within the *Gemeinde*. Their attempts to gain legal independence failed, and they consequently paid communal taxes as well as dues to their own organization. Membership thus required a certain amount of affluence. While influential in the long-term, the Reform community remained relatively small, primarily because over the course of the 1860s and 1870s the main congregation introduced similar, although more moderate, type of reforms that satisfied large numbers of worshippers. The initial gap between the radical reformers and the larger Jewish

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

population decreased as the latter became more open to change – a process Hammer-Schenk called *Angleichung* or alignment. When Jews were finally permitted, after the Law of Withdrawal passed in 1876, to withdraw from the Jewish community without converting, the independent congregation remained small. Reform Jews in Berlin, however, contrary to London and Amsterdam, did have a permanent influence on the religious development of the community at large and consequently on synagogue design. The organ, for instance, found its way into the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue, while in England and Holland it remained rare.

By the time the first stone of the new synagogue was laid, Berlin had a Jewish community that was reasonably well-to-do, growing, primarily engaged in retail and textile manufacturing, highly acculturated, and religiously diverse, i.e., ranging from religiously orthodox to moderately liberal to Reform Jews. Building a synagogue that would appeal to this crowd would be a challenge indeed.

*Es traumten da die Schlechten  
Den Wahn von Menschenrechten  
Vom gleichen Recht für Alle  
Die Welt ist im Verfall*<sup>55</sup>

### **The Political Situation of Berlin Jewry**

The 1850s and 1860s have often been described as a time of progress for German Jewry. A sense of optimism, nascent liberalism, and a growing Jewish self-confidence set the tone, finding their ultimate expression in the long-awaited unification of Germany and the legal emancipation of the Jews in 1871. The latter experienced great advances in

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<sup>55</sup> This short poem by H. Schmitt was quoted in an article entitled “Die Rechte der Juden in Preussen,” *AZdJ* 24: 11 (March 13, 1860): 161-163. It translates to: “Bad people dreamt of the illusion of human rights, of equal rights for all; the world is in decay.”

the economic realm during this time,<sup>56</sup> participated in German society, and lived in a city that was quickly becoming renowned for its intellectual and cultural vitality. Compared to the previous century, the Jews of Berlin had undeniably come a long way. They now served on city councils (although these Jews had oftentimes converted to Christianity) and attended universities. Successful entrepreneurs, such as the Wertheim brothers, built large department stores. Many Jewish women, much in accordance with contemporary notions of domesticity, no longer worked outside of the home and could afford to dedicate themselves to raising *gebildete Kinder* and to Jewish charity work. In addition to these social and economic advances, so the argument goes, the political mood was promising. The 1848 revolution had been a clear indication that the traditional political landscape was in transformation. And to scholars who examined Jewish life in the German-speaking lands at this time, the 1850s and 60s appeared relatively peaceful compared to the decades that followed, when the forces of nationalism, *völkisch* romanticism, and racial antisemitism began to alter the milieu in which Jews lived.

The 1847 *Gesetz über die Verhältnisse der Juden* [law concerning the status of the Jews], in particular, which stipulated that the Jews had “the same rights and duties” as other citizens, signaled the arrival of a different political climate. While it had barely passed in the *Vereinigte Landtage* [the United Provincial Parliaments], and while it had only been approved on the condition that there were exceptions to the rule – pertaining more to duties than to rights – it did promise Jews the same legal status as Christians. It also granted the Berlin community autonomy with regard to worship and an entitlement

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Brenner has shown that in 1848 only 15-30percent of German Jews had entered the bourgeoisie and were counted in the middle or upper tax classes. By 1871, this number had grown to over 60percent. Some 4-25percent of all German Jewry, argues Brenner, was still poor. See “Between Revolution and Legal Equality,” in Michael A. Meyer (ed.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times. Vol. 2: Emancipation and Acculturation, 1780-1871* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 297-318.

to subsidies from the state and the municipal authorities. Jewish congregations, similar to Christian ones, would from this point forward be acknowledged as autonomous public bodies. However, the failure of the revolution the following year, reaffirming the strength of counter-revolutionary conservatism, halted political reform and prolonged the emancipation debate.<sup>57</sup> The 1850s and 60s may have been a time of transition, but the outcome of that transition was by no means determined.

We should thus be careful not to overestimate the exceptional nature of the decades between the revolution and German unification and remain sensitive to political continuities. Many Jews may have been optimistic about their future, but sources reveal that there was never an abandonment of the realization that a setback or backlash was a possibility – the unrelenting attempts by political conservatives to revise the Prussian constitution and the persistent *Judenfrage* in public debates made this only too clear. While most Jews considered Prussia their *Heimatsboden*, their homeland, they were still denied equal rights. The two-steps-forward, one-step-back method of emancipation and the objections expressed by Protestant and Catholic traditionalists alike did not disappear, which led to uncertainty and frustration. “Whoever believes that the age of fanaticism is over and that it will never return,” warned the *AZdJ* in 1865, “labors under a misapprehension. We are the last ones who want to arouse fear or paint a bleak picture, but it is foolish to idly deny the existing hostile elements [in Prussian society] and to

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<sup>57</sup> “Die Gleichberechtigung der Juden in Preussen,” *AZdJ* 30: 32 (August 7, 1866): 499-501: “[Es] kam ein neues Judengesetz zu Stande, das am 23. Juli 1847 ausgefertigt wurde. Auch diese Gesetz erkannte in par. 1 den Juden ‘neben gleichen Pflichten auch gleich bürgerliche Rechte mit den christlichen Unterthanen’ zu, jedoch mit den Ausnahmen, welche das Gesetz enthielt, Ausnahmen, die sich nicht auf die Pflichten, sonder auf die Rechte bezogen . . . In der Wirklichkeit kam nicht einmal dieses, z. B. nicht par. 2 zur Ausführung.”



nurture false security.”<sup>58</sup> Prussia, and the German states as a whole, as everyone knew, behaved differently towards the Jews than did other north European states. The juridical status of the Jews remained dependent on local legislation, always containing discriminatory clauses and restrictions. While conditions for the Jews thus improved, these conditions were never taken for granted and as a result the Jews of Berlin were not, as in Amsterdam and London at this time, convinced that emancipation was guaranteed. Prussia, after all, as one contemporary observed, “[found] itself suspended between a modern and a reactionary state, which offer[ed] a curious theater displaying a great battle between new and old ideas.”<sup>59</sup>

The problem of realizing Jewish emancipation in Prussia was multifold. First, traditional aristocratic powers and conservative voices remained strong in Prussian politics, slowing down the process of liberalization, especially that involving the Jewish population. It was quite common to hear comments in the House of Representatives like that of Herr von Senfft-Pilsach, who claimed that the fatherland of the Jews was Palestine rather than Prussia and that the Jews were not merely strangers, but enemies to the Christian state.<sup>60</sup> Concerned politicians, he urged, had to do everything in their power to

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<sup>58</sup> “Der Verein für allgemeine Angelegenheiten des Judenthums,” *AZdJ* 29: 33 (August 15, 1865): 501-504. The editors made a similar remarks elsewhere, for instance in an article entitled “Judenthum und Deutschthum,” in which they expressed their frustration over the slow pace of obtaining equality: “The authors of the constitution are still unable to conceive of the Jews as Germans, despite the fact that the former have resided in the Fatherland for a thousand years. Why not be honest? Of all the cultured peoples the Germans have resisted our emancipation most passionately and most persistently, and it is the German states that have yet to grant us complete equality. . . . Yes, precisely because so much has been written and said about it proves that in Germany people have to overcome an extraordinary feat in order to acknowledge equal rights, and the latter is still unrealized in most German lands.” *AZdJ* 29: 17 (April 25, 1865): 251-256.

<sup>59</sup> “Friedrich Wilhelm IV,” *AZdJ* 25: 7 (February 12, 1861): 87-90. “So stets in der Mitte zwischen den modernen und reactionären Staates stehend, Beiden angehörend, von Beiden in Anspruch genommen, bietet Preußen ein eigenthümliches Schauspiel, und zeichnet des großen Kampf der neuen und alten Ideen ab.”

<sup>60</sup> “Das Herrenhaus, das Ministerium und die Judenfrage,” *AZdJ* 24: 15 (April 10, 1860): 224-227. “Die große Masse des Capitals sei auf Seiten der Juden,” maintained Senfft-Pilsach, “Das Vaterland der Juden

prevent these subjects of the state from obtaining full legal rights. One Herr Graff von Stolberg, too, a member of parliament, proclaimed that he found it “a laughing matter to speak of Jewish rights. The Jews should have no rights whatsoever; they are an alien, wandering *Volk* of a different race, of different blood and with a different morality.”<sup>61</sup> The press was not shy of repeating these anti-Jewish sentiments. The *Preussische Volksblatt*, for instance, announced it would “act with the utmost energy against the Jews’ aim to achieve equality to the Christian members of the state,” a message, responded the *AZdJ*, they had been publicizing for weeks from every street corner in Berlin.<sup>62</sup> While there was an equal number of liberal politicians and progressive newspapers that countered this message, the persistence of hostile voices was tangible and disconcerting.

When legislative measures favorable to the Jews did pass, they oftentimes remained ambiguous and consequently weak. Article 12 of the revised 1851 constitution, for instance, guaranteed freedom of religion and prohibited discrimination on the basis of religious faith. Article 14, however, emphasized the Christian character of those institutions that were “connected with the exercise of religious functions,” which meant that education, marriage, state ceremonies, the military and the judiciary – all of which

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sei nicht Preußen, sondern Palastina. So lange das Christenthum existirte, seien die Juden als Feinde desselben betrachtet worden.”

<sup>61</sup> Von Stolberg’s *referat* was published, among others, in the 1854 editions of the *Neue Preußische Zeitung* and the *Spencersche Zeitung*, copies of which can be found in the Landesarchiv Berlin: A. Rep. 002, no. 43: “Soziale Verhältnisse der Juden,” p. 69-71. “Die jüdische Intelligenz,” added Stolberg, “erkenne ich vollkommen an, die Juden haben aber keine deutsche, sondern eine orientalische Intelligenz. Sie passen, vermoge ihrer Race, nicht zu unseren Gebrauchen, und ihre Sitten nicht zu den unsrigen. Wir haben durchaus keine Verpflichtung, ein auf Schacher eingewandertes Volk als gleichberechtigt unter uns aufzunehmen.”

<sup>62</sup> “Berlin,” *AZdJ* 24: 10 (March 6, 1860): 153-154. Two years later, the *AZdJ* reported (immediately following a discussion on the introduction of an organ in the new synagogue) that the *Preussische Volksverein*, a reactionary political organization with its headquarters in the Wilhemsstraße, had grown to some 16,000 members. One of its main objectives was to campaign against Jewish emancipation. See “Berlin,” *AZdJ* 26: 31 (July 29, 1862):426.

required taking a Christian oath – remained areas of ambiguity when they involved Jews.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the latter were denied access to civil service positions, to academic chairs, and to high ranks in the military. Mixed marriages remained outlawed in most German states. And, as an 1859 petition to the House of Representatives showed, Jewish architects were prohibited from working for the Prussian state as it was “inappropriate” for a Jew to design German buildings.<sup>64</sup>

The *AZdJ* kept its readers up to date about the legal appeals challenging these prohibitions. It regularly published the minutes of parliamentary meetings, particularly those concerning *Judengesetze* [Jewish clauses]. These minutes reveal not merely the adamant opposition of many Prussian politicians to Jewish emancipation; they also point to the myriad attempts by Jews to alter the “abnormal state of affairs” existing in Prussia.<sup>65</sup> The pursuit of equality thus remained arduous. An 1862 editorial reported in frustration that many state ministers still blatantly claimed that “Jews are not Germans” and that the legislative promises of the previous years were “mere illusions.” In fact, stated the editorial, “freedom of conscience is still far from being realized.”<sup>66</sup> One

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<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Article 12 issue see Peter G. J. Pulzer, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 34-35; Eugen Wolbe, *Geschichte der Juden in Berlin und in der Mark Brandenburg* (Berlin: Verlag Kedem, 1937); Andreas Nachama, Julius H. Schoeps, and Hermann Simon (eds.), *Jews in Berlin* (Berlin: Henschel, 2002); Jacob Toury, *Soziale und politische Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, 1847-1871* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1977); Arno Herzig, *Jüdische Geschichte in Deutschland: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2002).

<sup>64</sup> “Berlin,” *AZdJ* 23: 14 (March 28, 1859): 200-201.

<sup>65</sup> “Die Verhandlung im Abgeordnetenhaus,” *AZdJ* 23: 15 (April 4, 1859): 212-217. “So haben denn Verhandlungen über die gesetzlichen Verhältnisse der Juden im preußischen Staate stattgefunden, im preußischen Staate, wo noch immer der abnorme Zustand herrscht, daß die Verfassung die völle Gleichstellung unbedingt ausspricht, und die Verwaltungsbehörden sie nicht in Vollzug bringen.”

<sup>66</sup> “Preußen. Die jüngsten Debatten,” *AZdJ* 26: 29 (July 15, 1862): 391; “Die Petitionen an das preuss. Abgeordnetenhaus und das preuss. Staatsministerium,” *AZdJ* 30: 43 (October 23, 1866): 675-676. “[Es] sehen sich die Preussen jüdischen Glaubens immer noch in wesentlichen staatsbürgerlichen Rechten benachtheiligt und ausgeschlossen . . . aber das können wir nicht aufhören geltend zu machen, daß das Staatsgrundgesetz so lange für uns, für 300,000 Preussen, nur illusorische Bestimmungen enthält . . . daß in der That die Gewissensfreiheit so lange noch nicht verwirklicht ist.”

Catholic member of parliament named Reichensperger admitted this was true and that “the Prussian people, if asked one by one, would most likely not vote for the emancipation of the Jews.” It could not be denied, after all, that they had “a harmful influence in the literary, political, and commercial realm.”<sup>67</sup>

Over the course of the 1850s and 1860s political conservatives repeatedly tried to eliminate article 12 from the constitution, or at least to eradicate the words “the exercise of the civil rights of citizens is independent of religious faith.” They saw the German state as Christian and opposed separating church and state. One parliamentary representative, Herr Parrisius, recognized that “the emancipation of the Jews went hand in hand with the liberal development of the state,”<sup>68</sup> and many conservatives were determined to fight both. These political debates about the Jews, then, as Peter Pulzer rightly contended, were not merely debates about a particular religious minority; they were primarily debates about the character of the German nation. To many Prussians, the basis for a German fatherland was not citizenship, as it was in Holland and Great Britain, but rather the *Volk*, which was defined by a common culture and descent.<sup>69</sup> The Jewish question and the German question were thus intimately related. To the *AZdJ*, the renewed challenges to the constitution and the glaring incompleteness of emancipation signaled a *Rückschritte*, a step backwards. Indeed, it stated at one point, the situation in the mid-

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<sup>67</sup> “Der Sieg der Gewissensfreiheit in dem preußischen Abgeordnetenhaus,” *AZdJ* 20: 12 (March 17, 1856): 155-158. Reichensperger tolerated the legal emancipation of the Jews, but only because he believed that “the cross,” rather than force, was the way to eventually get German Jews to convert to Christianity.

<sup>68</sup> “Preussen. Die jüngsten Debatten,” *AZdJ* 26: 29 (July 15, 1862): 391. “Die gegenwärtige Lage der Sache sei eben nur ein Spiegelbild unserer verfassungsmässigen Zustände überhaupt, wie denn ein früherer Ausspruch im Hause sehr richtig sei, daß die Emancipation der Juden stets mit der freiheitlichen Entwicklung der Nation Hand in Hand gegangen sei.”

<sup>69</sup> Pulzer, 15.

fifties was worse than before the 1848 revolution as this time around “they don’t refuse us what we desire, but they take away what we already possess.”<sup>70</sup>

A second problem complicating the case for emancipation concerned the unashamed refusal of the local authorities to implement and enforce legal amendments. There was a clear gap between official rhetoric and practice, and many unwritten laws continued to exclude the Jews from numerous areas of German society. “The legal conditions of Jews,” wrote one contributor in 1859, “have certainly not improved in the last few years . . . In Prussia full equality is mentioned in the constitutional charter, but not realized in practice.” Only a “restless, persistent striving,” advised the author, would ensure real progress.<sup>71</sup> This striving found expression in writing petitions designed to challenge Jewish legislation, in gathering signatures from *Gemeinde* representatives across the German lands to protest prejudice, and in acting as spokesmen for common economic and cultural objectives in various associations. Indeed, as Reinhard Rürup has argued, the Jews ceased to be mere passive objects of politics after the events of 1848 and began to challenge legal restrictions.<sup>72</sup> Constructing a monumental synagogue, the first

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<sup>70</sup> “Ein Rückblick auf die politische Stellung der Juden,” *AZdJ* 18: 51 (December 18, 1854): 639-42. According to this piece, the mid-fifties were a time of “Rueckschritte, durch welche uns die erlangten staatsbürgerlichen Recht wieder genommen wurden. Wenn man nun auch nur von wenigen Ländern, wie zum Beispiel Kurhessen, sagen kann, dass es schlimmer geworden um uns Juden, als 1847: so ist es doch darum schlimmer geworden überall, weil man uns jetzt nicht verweigert, was wir wünschen, sondern uns nimmt, was wir schon besessen.”

<sup>71</sup> “Das Recht der Juden,” *AZdJ* 22: 11 (March 8, 1858): 141-142. “Est ist fürwahr zu aller Zeit die rechte, immer von Neuem und immer wieder den Anspruch zu erheben auf das Recht, welches uns versagt wird, oder doch noch unerfüllt geblieben . . . Nur ein rustloses, beharrliches Streben führt auch under ungünstigen Umständen zum Ziele. Stillschweigen erscheint als Zugeständniss für den Gegner. Und dann ist es auch nicht wahr, daß nicht noch immer neue Geisten aufzufinden und hervorzuheben wären, da in der Entwicklung der Verhältnisse und Ereignisse die Situation immer eine neue wird. Die Rechtsverhältnisse unsrer Glaubensgenossen sind allerdings in den letzten Jahren nicht vorwärts gekommen. . . in Preussen steht die Gleichheit aller Preussen ohne Unterschied der Religion noch immer nur in der Verfassungs-urkunde, ohne daß die Verwirklichung sich blicken läßt.”

<sup>72</sup> Reinhard Rürup, “The European Revolutions of 1848 and Jewish Emancipation,” in *Revolution and Evolution 1848 in German-Jewish History*, 31. Even in 1870, a Berlin Jew named Dr. Pinner crafted a petition to the “hohen Reichstag des Norddeutschen Bundes” to protest “the cruel disdain and contempt for our lawful claims.” He requested *Gemeinde* leaders in Berlin and elsewhere to sign the petition to increase

stone of which was laid in 1859, was one more public expression of their demand for recognition.

A third and final deterrent concerned the conditional quality of Jewish emancipation. Even the Liberals, most of whom supported the Jewish cause, considered it a right based on merit rather than an expression of the principle of equality for all citizens. If the Jews wanted more than what Abraham Geiger called *kümmelerliche Duldung* [scanty toleration], demanding instead to be loyal members of the *Volk*, then they had to lose their “alien” characteristics. Implied in this *quid pro quo* was the hope that the Jews would eventually convert to Christianity and denounce their loyalty to Palestine.<sup>73</sup> While Berlin Jewry had met the demands for acculturation and while it had eliminated references to Zion and the Chosen People from its religious services, the majority did not convert. This was unnerving to many Prussians, who could not harmonize the idea of a German national identity with religious pluralism, of German Jews supposedly pledging allegiance to two nations. Moreover, granting Jews equality would permanently end the church-inspired narrative of Jewish wandering and diasporic suffering, and announce instead that the latter had found a new homeland in Prussia, where Jewish judges had authority over Christians and where Jewish teachers could instruct Christian children. Many gentiles felt uncomfortable with this prospect and, as a result, continued to exclude Jews from educational, judicial, and political positions.

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the strength of its message. Nervous about the outcome of Prussia’s war with France, Pinner feared a return to the 1847 Judengesetz and encouraged Jews to fight for their rights with all the energy and stamina that they could muster. See CAHJP - D/Be4/13: “Wohlgeborene Herren! Sehr geehrte Herren Gemeinde-Vorsteher!” (April 12, 1870).

<sup>73</sup> For more on the expectation for Jews to eventually convert to Christianity, see Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State*, 16.

In Prussia, then, politics and religion were still closely intertwined in the 1850s and 1860s. The lingering presence of conservative opposition, non-violent forms of discrimination towards the Jews, and the indecisiveness with respect to the Jewish question rendered the path toward legal emancipation untidy and unpredictable. Indeed, the deferment of full legal rights and the discourse on implementing new *Judengesätze* to liberalize the existing ones only resulted in a renewed affirmation of separateness. One female member of the local elite, who wrote a frank account of Berlin society under the pseudonym Count Paul Vasili, acutely sensed this tension. “There is no city in the whole world,” she wrote, “where the children of Israel are more rejected by society, but on the other hand none where society derives more benefit from them.”<sup>74</sup> In that respect, she concluded, Berlin differed fundamentally from west European capitals, where gentiles were not “reluctant to shake hands with a Jew” in public.

Viewed in the larger historical context of northern Europe, and particularly in comparison to Amsterdam and London, it seems that those Jews with the fewest rights made the loudest public statements, in the literary, political, and aesthetic realm, not because they wanted to – out of pride or gratitude – but because they needed to. Dutch and English Jews had full legal rights but remained relatively inconspicuous in their public presence. Drawing attention to themselves served no purpose. German Jewry, on the other hand, was dealing with a persistent *Judenfrage* that demanded an active involvement, if not by the average Jewish textile manufacturer, then by *Gemeinde* leaders. Building a monumental oriental landmark contributed a strong voice. Precisely because the existence of a “political move backwards” and a “spirit of gloom against us”

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<sup>74</sup> Count Paul Vasili, *Berlin Society*, translated from the French by J. Loder (New York: S. W. Green’s Son, 1884), 133. Count Paul Vasili was the pen name of Catherine Radziwill (1858-1941), née Ekaterina Adamovda Rzewuska, who was a member of the Berlin nobility and wife of Prince Wilhelm Radziwill.

could not be denied, stated the *AZdJ* in the mid-fifties, the Jews should “strive for the best and the most noble, for *Bildung* and civilized behavior, and manifest the elevation of [their] religion ever more forcefully. Because even if the improvement of our political situation is unlikely and even if experience has taught us that prejudice and bigotry are hard to overcome, at least the social aversion against us might be banned.”<sup>75</sup>

This does not mean that every member of the Berlin Jewish community was at all times actively engaged in the emancipation debate. The average middle-class Jew was most likely content with his life and might have signed a petition while on his way to work. Moreover, many Jews, as a response to discrimination, fulfilled their social and cultural ambitions by founding their own societies and organizations – a tactic that some historians have termed “negative integration.”<sup>76</sup> The Jewish press and communal leadership, however, did take an active stance to realize legal equality and they did so by filing petitions to Prussian parliament, by informing the population of the *Judenfrage* debates, and by initiating a massive building program, the likes of which Berlin had not seen before.

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<sup>75</sup> “Ein Rückblick auf die politische Stellung der Juden,” *AZdJ* 18: 51 (December 18, 1854): 641. “Daß neben dieser politischen Zurücksetzung im Allgemeinen auch ein düsterer, socialer Geist gegen uns sich verbreitet hat, ist nicht zu verkennen; gerade dieses aber muß uns anspornen, dem Besten und Edelsten nachzustreben, in Bildung und Gesittung voranzuschreiten, und die Erhabenheit unserer Religion immer mehr zur Erscheinung zu bringen: denn wenn auch die Besserung unsere politischen Stellung lange nicht zu erhoffen ist, und wenn auch die Erfahrung uns gelehrt, dass Vorurtheil und Behäftigkeit schwer zu besiegen sind, so kann doch gerade die sociale Mißgunst durch unermüdliches und allgemeines Streben gebannt werden.”

<sup>76</sup> Shulamit Volkov, for instance, uses this expression in her recent study *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). “Negative integration,” she writes, refers to Jews “emulating the customs of the surrounding world while remaining within the confines of one’s own collectivity,” a tactic that actually increased the Jews’ particularism. Volkov borrowed the term from the German historian Dieter Groh, whose *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Frankfurt: Propylaen) appeared in 1973.



## The Oranienburgerstraße Synagogue

The building history of the synagogue began in 1846, when *Gemeinde* officials first submitted a request to the Prussian *Ministerium des Innern* to build a second house of worship. “The synagogue of the Jewish community that is currently located in the Heidereutergasse,” stated the appeal, “no longer suffices to host the large numbers of members on Sabbath and especially on the High Holidays . . . It is therefore an urgent necessity to erect a new synagogue and to commence building one quite soon.”<sup>77</sup> In the same year prominent members of the community formed a “committee for the construction of a new synagogue,” which included, among others, the well-to-do silk manufacturer Joel Wolff Meyer. With the appeal process started, the committee proceeded and proposed a plan to raise the necessary funds. By selling seats for the new synagogue – the number of which were yet to be determined – it hoped to attract sponsors and to commit community members to the project. “For the time being though,” stated the committee, “only between 600 and 800 seats can be purchased, namely first-class seats for 150 thaler and second-class seats for 100 thaler.”<sup>78</sup> Unsure about the outcome of their request to the *Ministerium* and about the size and location of the building, the committee erred on the conservative side. It would take more than ten years before the Jews received permission to build and twenty years before the project was completed – quite a different scenario than in Amsterdam and London.

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<sup>77</sup> Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußer Kulturbesitz [GSPK]: I. HA, Rep. 77, Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 1021, No. 62, Band 2. Letter dated February 2, 1846.

<sup>78</sup> “Vorläufig werden jedoch nur 600 bis höchstens 800 Sitze vom Gemeindemitgliedern erworben werden können, und zwar so, daß für einen Sitz der Klasse A 150 Thlr. und für einen Sitz der Klasse B 100 Thlr. einzuzahlen sind.” CAHJP : Moritz Stern Collection, P 17/573, p. 1. Joel Wolff Meyer purchased four A-category seats (two women’s and two men’s seats) and two B-category seats (one for in the women’s and one for the male’s section) and paid a total of 800 Thaler. This was a significant amount of money at the time. Alexander Mendelssohn, a Berlin banker, spent 200 Thaler while Wilhem Beer reserved two A-category seats for himself and his brother, Giacomo Meyerbeer. These were prominent Jews who could afford to spend money – Wilhelm Beer, for instance, added a 100 Thaler donation when purchasing his seats. See Moritz Stern Collection, P17/573, p. 4.

The committee members were initially drawn to a plot of land in the immediate vicinity of the Heidereutergasse synagogue in Berlin Mitte, on which stood an old lumber warehouse. The majority of Jews lived in the surrounding area and it would be convenient to have religious services at a nearby location. King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, however, vetoed this site. The relevant ministries had advised him the place was far too prominent and would make the Jews too visible to the public. The close vicinity of the site to the Christian Garrison (garrison) church, in particular, was objectionable. A communiqué from the city authorities to the king expressed concern that the presence of Jews might “disturb” Christian worshippers. Attracting more Jews to an already predominantly Jewish area by building a “synagogue in a public, conspicuous place” [“ein Synagoge an einem öffentlichen von allen Seiten in die Augen fallenden Platz”] would be disruptive for pious Christians attending Sunday services. On the basis of these obstacles, stated the letter, “[we] have few qualms about dismissing the present appeal made by the [Jewish] Elders.”<sup>79</sup> Not only did city officials turn down the choice of location, they rejected the request to build altogether. While Jews had been a constant presence in Berlin since the 1670s, the authorities preferred to keep their visibility to a minimum and to keep the practice of Judaism largely confined out of sight.

The king, on the recommendation of city officials, consequently denied the appeal, although his statement rephrased the reasons for dismissal: “[I]t appears to me this particular building site is not suitable because of its limited distance from the existing synagogue, which would be inconvenient for Jews living in other areas in the city.” In other words Jews, not Christians, would be the ones inconvenienced by a new house of

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<sup>79</sup> GSPK: I. HA, Rep. 77, Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 1021, No. 62, Band 2: “Denkschrift der Minister des Innern und für geistliche Angelegenheiten an den König,” January 11, 1847.

worship built in the middle of the Jewish neighborhood. Wilhelm did, however, propose another option: “[W]ould it not be preferable to execute the intended construction in a remote area of the city, perhaps in Köpenickerfelde. In this case I would not be against a building site located directly on the street.”<sup>80</sup> This remark suggests that the king was not against constructing a new synagogue per se, but that he opposed the idea of having two in the city center. By relegating the Jews to Köpenickerfelde [today known as Kreuzberg], the king could satisfy all parties. He could grant Jews permission to build their house of worship, appease the Berlin officials, and keep Christians on their way to the Garrison church from being “disturbed” by encountering an increasing number of Jews. Even better, a new synagogue situated on the outskirts of Berlin would entice Jews to relocate from Mitte to less populated neighborhoods, thereby contributing to the development of the city. According to Harold Hammer-Schenk this tactic suggests that Wilhelm disadvantaged the Jews not merely because he disliked them, but also because he considered the long-term urban development of Berlin.<sup>81</sup> This is, however, speculation. What we can state with certainty is that in the late 1840s Prussian Jews, and building projects proposed by the Jewish *Gemeinde*, were still highly dependent on the goodwill and approval of the king.

That the Köpenickerfelde alternative did not please Jewish leaders is not surprising. Erecting a new synagogue at a significant distance from where the vast

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<sup>80</sup> GSPK: I. HA, Rep. 77, Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 1021, No. 62, Band 2. Edict of January 29, 1847. That the authorities’ preferences for the periphery grew out of more than anti-Jewish sentiments and was in part related to urban planning is suggested by the emergence of Christian churches in Berlin’s periphery. The Markuskirche (1855), designed by August Stüler, and the Catholic Michaelskirche (1856), by August Soller, were assigned to similarly peripheral areas and could not be built in the city center. Encouraging residents to settle away from the city center and to build communities in suburban neighborhoods would be beneficial to Berlin’s economic development.

<sup>81</sup> Harold Hammer-Schenk, “Baugeschichte und Architektur der Neuen Synagoge,” in Hermann Simon (ed.), *Tuet auf die Pforten’: Die Neue Synagoge 1866-1995* (Berlin: Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum, 1995), 44.

majority of worshippers lived was counterproductive, and the potential barrage of complaints about its remote location was not something to look forward to. The outbreak of the revolution, however, temporarily halted the negotiations. Prussia's ruling order and long-held power relations were challenged and the air was brimming with excitement. King Friedrich Wilhelm and the Berlin authorities had more pressing problems on their hands than the construction of a new synagogue. And to Jewish officials, seeking permission to build at a time when Prussia's traditional power structure appeared to be crumbling and a royal consent might soon be obsolete, seemed pointless. Only in the mid-1850s, when it became clear that the counter-revolution was strong in Prussia, did negotiations resume.

Building initiatives were further halted by growing tensions between Jews advocating Reform and those in favor of strictly Orthodox practice. Many feared that a second synagogue would intensify religious divisions in the *Gemeinde* and promote communal fragmentation. Having Reform-oriented members congregate in the new synagogue while the Orthodox met in the existing building was not considered conducive to communal harmony and it made a bad impression on the Christian public. A new executive council therefore voted in July 1852 to put a stop to further construction plans. "We have come to the conclusion to depart from earlier intentions proposed by the previous community council to build a second synagogue, and to reconstruct and expand the existing synagogue instead." The advocates of Reform, after all, only "encouraged destructive ideas, which worked to the disadvantage of the political situation . . . A productive means to combat these ideas . . . lies in the preservation of external unity [and] in the collection of everyone in one synagogue for religious services. This is the primary

reason [why we are against] the plan to found a second synagogue.”<sup>82</sup> This decision greatly annoyed the building committee member Joel Wolff Meyer, who confessed privately that he, “an honorable man who has been greatly involved in the cause,” found himself “deceived and betrayed by the obstinacy of orthodox Jews who prevent anything from happening.”<sup>83</sup> Meyer’s complaints, however, did little to change the minds of Jewish officials. The latter decided, as an alternative, to enlarge the Heidereutergasse structure at a cost of approximately 9,000 thaler. They engaged the Protestant architect, Eduard Knoblauch (1801-65), who expanded the building’s capacity and repainted the decorative interior in an eclectic classical-Romanesque style, the “simplicity of which linked the synagogue to modern elegance.”<sup>84</sup> He also added anterooms, a second gallery, and pews. According to Hammer-Schenk, however, the reconstruction of the old synagogue had the opposite effect of what the executive council envisioned. The renovation of the building was received so well by congregants that many desired further improvements on a large scale – especially as the enlargement failed to solve the persistent lack of space.<sup>85</sup>

There were also individual attempts to provide accommodations. A master carpenter by the name of Fränkel renovated an existing building at Große Hamburgerstraße no. 11 as a synagogue, which the community rented (fig. 3). Known as

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<sup>82</sup> GSPK: I. HA, Rep. 77, Ministerium des Innern, Titl. 1021, Nr. 62, Band 2. Request sent by the Berlin Jewish *Gemeinde* to the Ministerium der geistlichen Angelegenheiten, July 10, 1852.

<sup>83</sup> “Es soll uns Brüdern zur Freude gereichen, wenn ein ehrenwerther Mann, der sich so eifrig in dieser Sache bemüht, wie Ew. Hochwohlgeboren, sich zuletzt nicht doch getäuscht findet, wenn die Zeit es lehren wird, daß mit der Halsstarrigkeit orthodoxer Juden nichts auszurichten ist.” CAHJP: Moritz Stern Collection, P 17/573, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> “Preußen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 19: 30 (July 23, 1855): 386; “Preußen,” *AZdJ* 19: 38 (September 17, 1855): 486-487.

<sup>85</sup> Hammer-Schenk, 44.

the *Notsynagoge*, the *Provisorische-Synagoge*, or the *Interims-Synagoge*,<sup>86</sup> it provided space for approximately 1,800 worshippers. The building, approximately 130 feet long and 50 feet wide, was located in the back of the narrow site and bordered the future Oranien-burgerstraße synagogue. Municipal drawings show a rectangular, multi-story building with two rows of pews facing the bimah and the ark, and two galleries alongside the northern and southern wall.<sup>87</sup> Surrounded by a garden, a garden house, and the Jewish hospital, the synagogue was practically invisible from the street and most likely unknown to Christian passersby. For practicing Jews, however, the structure, which Franken owned, offered temporary relief while community leaders put further expansion plans on hold. The financial records of the community list another *Interims-Synagoge* located at Unter den Linden no. 44, for which they paid 330 thaler in rent in 1865.<sup>88</sup>

In 1856, a year after the election of a new community council, the *Gemeinde* purchased the plot at Oranienburgerstraße no. 30. In the following months, even before they had received official permission to build, the council asked Knoblauch – whose private home stood in the Oranienburgerstraße, at no. 101 – to create a design. This suggests either that, after ten years of negotiations with the Prussian authorities, Jewish officials felt they were nearing a conclusion, or that they considered the available site too ideal to pass on, even if they had to wait for another ten years to lay the first stone. The lack of source material leaves this question unanswered, although the fact that Knoblauch began drawing so soon suggests that perhaps both factors played a role.

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<sup>86</sup> See for instance in “Preussen,” *AZdJ* 18, no. 42 (October 16, 1854): 528.

<sup>87</sup> The illustrations shown here are owned by the Landesarchiv in Berlin: A. Rep. 010-02, no. 2996, “Synagoge Große Hamburgerstraße 11.” Fränkel must have worked on the reconstruction for years, since his sketches are dated September, 1842.

<sup>88</sup> CAHJP: Jüdische Gemeinde Berlin - D/Be4/122, “Uebersicht der Einnahmen und Ausgaben bei der Haupt-Kasse der jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin in dem Jahre 1865,” p. 6.

The location was indeed close to ideal. The Oranienburgerstraße was one of the arteries of Berlin Mitte; although not upscale or particularly fashionable, it was a respectable street that contained low-built, two to three-story residential homes owned by lower to upper middle-class families. From the variety of possible sites, wrote Knoblauch's son in 1866, the Oranienburgerstraße site had the "special advantage of circumstance" [*Umstand*], despite its "inconvenient shape for a monumental building."<sup>89</sup> It was situated in the center of the city's Jewish neighborhood: in the eastern corner of the plot stood the hospital, there were a number of smaller synagogues in the immediate vicinity, most Jews resided in the area, and virtually all communal institutions – such as the rabbinate, the seminary, the orphanages, and Jewish schools – were nearby. Erecting a monumental synagogue anywhere else at this time would have been illogical.

While the choice of location was self-evident, the choice of architectural style was not. That the synagogue would be built according to a Moorish design was not a foregone conclusion. Indeed, Knoblauch's early sketches show variations of a highly classicist design, one that included a rather stiff façade with eight narrow pillars, rectangular arched windows, and a central entrance way featuring a modest tympanon and five steps (fig. 5). A massive dome was to crown the main prayer room, which contained two rows of circular windows to provide the interior with natural light. The architect's early proposals, however, highlighted two problems, the first of which concerned the oddly-shaped plot. It was a rectangular site with an unfavorable angle, which meant that the

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<sup>89</sup> E. Knoblauch, "Die neue Synagoge in Berlin," *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 16 (1866): 3-6. "Unter den verschiedenen dazu in Vorschlag gebrachten Plätzen, welche Knoblauch zur bessern Beurtheilung der Commission, mit begleitenden Grundrifsskizzen versah, blieb man schließlich bei dem Grundstück Oranienburgerstraße no. 30 stehen, für welches neben sonstigen Vortheilen besonders der Umstand sprach, daß es, wie aus dem Situationspläne ersichtlich ist, mit dem Grundstücke des bereits von Knoblauch erbaten Krankenhauses der jüdischen Gemeinde in Zusammenhange stand."

building's longitudinal axis had to turn into an east-west direction in order for worshippers to face Jerusalem. "It met the street at a crooked angle," explains Lothar Brieger, "and its borders were irregular due to the neighboring property that encroached upon it. These were restrictive problems for a monumental building."<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the street front was narrow while space further back widened, which complicated matters. Knoblauch's first drafts dealt insufficiently with these structural challenges and failed to maximize the use of space. A second problem involved the visibility of the building. Because the latter was located away from the main street façade, the visibility of the dome and the synagogue as a whole was reduced – a feature that we know Jewish officials disapproved of as they specified in a later design competition announcements that "the synagogue ha[d] to be visible and the building as well as the entrance ha[d] to clearly display their worthy purpose."<sup>91</sup> Whether the proposed classical style was a bone of contention is unclear. What we do know is that the community council "could not come to an agreement on the design and preferred to hear other options. [It therefore] decided to announce a public design competition." A formal building committee was established under the chairmanship of Knoblauch, and the Architectural Society of Berlin was asked to act as judge to choose the most promising proposal. The decision to involve the Architectural Society in the process and to advertise an open competition in a well-known architectural journal indicates the extent to which synagogue building turned into a public affair.

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<sup>90</sup> Lothar Brieger, "Die Neue Synagoge in Berlin," *Gemeindeblatt der jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin* (September 13, 1936): 5.

<sup>91</sup> "Die Synagoge muß jedoch von der Strasse aus gesehen werden können und sie selbst sowohl als der Eingang sich dem Zweck entsprechend würdig darstellen." See "Concurrenz-Eröffnung für Pläne zu einer neuen Synagoge in Berlin," *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 7 (1857): 448-450.



A notice in the *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* in 1857 (fig. 6) listed the wishes of the building committee:

The Jewish community in Berlin intends to build a synagogue at Oranienburgerstraße 30 and offers a prize of 500, 300 and 200 thaler respectively for the three best design plans . . . Who will take charge of the building process is not determined by the prize-winning design. The main prayer room should not be positioned directly at the street, but should be reached through an enclosed entryway. . . However, [one] should be able to identify the synagogue from the street.”<sup>92</sup>

The building, the cost of which was not to exceed 125,000 thaler, was to provide seats for approximately 1,400 men and 800 women, as well as for 60 choir members positioned in the gallery. Knoblauch, enthusiastic about the project, remained a participant in the competition and submitted new designs. This time his drawings presented a building with Moorish overtones, a dramatically different type of synagogue than what he envisioned earlier. It was a toned-down version of previous sketches that featured an intensely oriental structure with an abundantly decorated exterior. They illustrate how Knoblauch played with the location of the dome; in one version he integrated it into the façade, while in another he placed it above the prayer room, situated away from the street front. The former was the basis for the final plan, although the intensity of its oriental design was toned down even further. Some of the elaborate decorative details, for instance, were replaced with a simpler finish. The triple, narrow window-panes set back in a rectangular frame, too, softened the strong oriental flavor, including instead hints of the local *Rundbogenstil* so typical of Schinkel.

Construction began in May, 1859, and as the project progressed it became increasingly clear how seriously the building committee had underestimated the costs. The committee had specified in its initial announcement that the total expenditure was not to exceed 125,000 thaler, but two years later it had to adjust the numbers when the

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<sup>92</sup> “Concurrenz-Eröffnung für Pläne zu einer neuen Synagoge in Berlin,” *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 7 (1857): 448-450.

*Gemeinde* took out a construction loan of 300,000 thaler at 5 percent interest. Over the course of the 1860s expenses soared. Financial records show that in 1865 expenditures had reached nearly 650,000 thaler, an amount, assured Jewish officials, which would not increase any further.<sup>93</sup> However, when the building was finally finished, the total cost had reached 750,000 thaler, which made the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue not merely the largest, but also the most expensive synagogue ever built.

The final structure, which had a depth of 308 feet, held 3,200 people (fig. 7). Its multi-colored brick front rose to 92 feet and was crowned by a spectacular 160-foot-high central dome with a Magen David at the top. The two side buildings, which featured narrow octagonal windowed turrets with Moorish decorative patterns, were topped with ribbed onion cupolas. The entrances on each side provided access to the women's galleries. The central portion of the façade included three tall, arched windows, under which a triple-arched portal appeared, fronted by a low, largely ornamental iron balustrade. The portal led male worshippers to the dodecagonal first room, the design of which camouflaged the oblique angle in the ground plan and guided people effortlessly to the sanctuary. Knoblauch, who placed the great dome over this dodecagonal space, had found an elegant solution to one of the difficulties in the original design.

The ante-room, encircled by a ribbed vaulted ambulatory, provided access to the men's vestibule, to the floors upstairs, and to the sanctuary. Before one entered the latter, however, one had to pass through a second room, which was often used for weekday services. Once congregants stepped into the main synagogue they faced what few

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<sup>93</sup> CAHJP: Jüdische Gemeinde Berlin - D/Be4/122, "An die verehrten Mitglieder unserer Gemeinde": "Da jedoch alle übrigen Baurechnungen fast vollständig erledigt sind, so befinden wir uns doch in der Lage, den verehrten Mitgliedern einstweilen die Mittheilung machen zu können, daß, einschließlich der Kaufgelder für das Grundstück, die gesammten Baukosten den Betrag von 650,000 Thalern wohl nicht übersteigen werden."

European Jews at that time had experienced, namely a magnificent space, 143 feet long and 126 feet wide, with a richly decorated vaulted ceiling, thousands of seats, an imposing apse that contained the ark and space for the choir, a ground floor adorned with mosaics, and large glass ceiling windows that allowed sunlight to descend directly on to the ark and the congregation. The galleries on the western side were two stories and were, together with those placed on the northern and southern walls, supported by slender, slate-colored iron pillars. The sophisticated lighting system, too, must have dazzled first-time visitors. The double windows allowed for the installation of gas lighting, a revolutionary system at the time, which supplied not merely light but also a warm, “magical” atmosphere during the evening hours.

The result of the *Gemeinde*’s twenty-year quest for a new synagogue was a remarkable building that visually marked Mitte as the center of Jewish life in Berlin. The executive committee, satisfied with the outcome, stated in a public communiqué that the synagogue’s design had remained “loyal to the character of the Jewish faith” and had steered clear of extremes.<sup>94</sup> That not everyone agreed with this assessment and that heated discussions regarding the extent of aesthetic and liturgical reforms had preceded the final result, was not mentioned. Since these debates contribute to our understanding of Jewish self-representation and nineteenth-century synagogue design, let us turn to one particularly contentious issue, the organ.

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<sup>94</sup> CAHJP: D/Be4/122, “An die verehrten Mitglieder unserer Gemeinde (1867), p. 4. “Was die gottesdienstlichen Einrichtungen dieser Synagoge anbetrifft, so documentiren dieselben, wie treu an dem Vorsätze festgehalten worden ist, fern von jeder extremen, mit dem Character des jüdischen Gottesdienstes nicht übereinstimmenden Anordnung, nur dahin zu wirken, dass dem Gotteshause die gebührende Achtung und dem Gottesdienste die geziemende Würde gewahrt werde. In der alten Synagoge ist der Gottesdienst unverändert in seiner bisherigen Gestalt verblieben, und sind es nur ausserliche, die Liturgie nicht beruhende Verbesserungen, auf welche, um den von vielen Besuchern dieses Gotteshauses uns vorgetragenen Wünschen entgegenzukommen, wohl Bedacht zu nehmen sein wird.” This notification was signed by “der Vorstand der judische Gemeinde: Magnus, Baswitz, Gumbinner, Aug. Hirsch, Jacoby, Liebermann, Waldeck.”

**“The organ is Christianity in sound, just as Gothic architecture is Christianity in brick”:  
The Debate over an Organ in the New Synagogue**

In September 1861, the executive committee of the Berlin *Gemeinde* convened to consider the introduction of an organ in the new synagogue. Knoblauch had not included one in his original designs, but it became increasingly clear that some Jews expected there to be one and they pressured committee members to bring the issue to the table. By December the *AZdJ* reported that the topic was causing “much excitement,” even “heated commotion.”<sup>95</sup> A few months later, petitions were circulating in the Jewish neighborhood, collecting some 1,200 signatures from *Familienvatern*, or family fathers, in favor of instrumental music. These petitions were intended to alter the minds of committee members, “the majority of whom opposed the idea of an organ.”<sup>96</sup> They were presented to the executive committee in the summer of 1862.

The debate over the suitability and legality of organs was not new and not limited to Berlin. The issue first arose in the early 1800s, when Israel Jacobson installed an organ in his synagogue in Seesen.<sup>97</sup> At this stage, however, the dispute revolved primarily around the existence or absence of instrumental music in the Temple in Jerusalem. Being able to prove either case could strengthen the arguments against or in favor of an organ. Both advocates and opponents, or as one observer called them *Orgel-freundlichen und Orgel-feindlichen*, presented “evidence” from rabbinic responsa and from the Talmud to make their case while passionately criticizing each other’s positions. Rabbi David Oppenheim, for instance, scorned those who argued that the Talmudic reference to a

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<sup>95</sup> “Berlin,” *AZdJ* 25, no. 51 (December 16, 1861).

<sup>96</sup> “Berlin,” *AZdJ* 26, no. 31 (July 29, 1862): 426.

<sup>97</sup> The synagogue in Seesen (1810) was the first Reform synagogue and reflected the efforts to harmonize the ways of Judaism with contemporary fashions. In front of the ark stood a pulpit, raised on steps, on which the sermons were presented. The bimah lost its central place and was moved toward to ark, which created a Protestant-like podium and which gave the preacher a dominant position. Also an organ installed.

מגריפה, a *magrefah* (Erachin 10b; Tamid 3,8), confirmed the use of an organ-type instrument in the ancient Temple. While the so-called *organum hydraulicum*, or water organ, existed, argued Oppenheim, the Talmud emphatically denied its use and he consequently called the “ganze Sache eine Chimäre.” These authors, in his opinion, used their inventive imaginations to legitimize instrumental music in the present-day synagogue. Another avid opponent, Marcus (Meyer) Lehmann from Mainz, added that instituting organ accompaniment was not merely unseemly, but was “illegal,” a violation of religious law.<sup>98</sup> Had Maimonides not been quite clear that playing a musical instrument on Sabbath constituted work and was therefore prohibited? Lehmann resented the fact that the construction of purpose-built, beautiful synagogues increasingly entailed the demolition of Jewish religious tradition. A new synagogue and an organ were not equivalent. We should look instead at medieval Spain, wrote Lehmann, where “architectural marvels were built, none of which contained musical accompaniment.”<sup>99</sup> Why this could not materialize in Prussia was beyond him. The religious texts and authorities of the past, as well as the synagogues of such admirable cultures as the Sephardim, in other words, all suggested that organs were an unnecessary evil.

Once it became evident that harps, flutes, and trumpets were indeed used in the Temple of Jerusalem, the focus of the debate shifted to the purpose of instrumental music. Some claimed that music had had only a secondary, supporting role in religious services and that it was not played on the Sabbath and on Festivals. Others questioned

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<sup>98</sup> The rabbi David Deutsch agreed: “daß vom talmudisch-rabbinischen Standpunkte aus die Einführung der Orgel in die Synagoge zu jeder Zeit, selbst an Werktagen, streng pentateuchisch (מדאורייתא) verboten, und deswegen eine Entweihung des jüdischen Gotteshauses ist.” Deutsch is quoted in A. Berliner’s *Zur Lehr und zur Wehr über und gegen die kirchliche Orgel im jüdischen Gottesdienste* (Berlin: Rathausen & Lamm, 1904), 51. This small volume is owned by Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana: Broch. Ros. N.a. 25.

<sup>99</sup> Marcus Lehmann, *Die Orgel in der Synagoge* (Mainz: Verlag der Le Roux’schen Hofbuchhandlung, 1860), 3-20. Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Amsterdam: Br. Ros. 1888.H.22.

this, claiming that only after the destruction of the Temple had religious leaders in the Diaspora banned instrumental music. By reintroducing the use of instruments in present-day synagogues, Jews would not merely intensify their religious experience and make the service more appealing; they would, in fact, restore an ancient Jewish tradition.

These kinds of arguments, along with the desire of bourgeois Jews to “elevate” their services, strengthened the claim for an organ in the Oranienburgerstraße. The conservatives found themselves increasingly outnumbered by moderate progressives, who opposed the type of radical reform espoused by the Johannisstraße congregation – e.g., Shabbat services on Sunday – but who nonetheless embraced contemporary notions of *Bildung*. An organ in the new synagogue, many believed, would express the religious refinement of Berlin Jewry and announce the modernization of their faith. Berlin’s rabbi, Michael Sachs, acutely felt the penetration of German *Bildung* into the sphere of Jewish religious traditions, although he himself, like other conservatives, was also very much a product of this cultural ideal. Sachs thus supported aesthetic reforms in the synagogue, but he could not bring himself to endorse the use of an organ as it would “alter the character of a Jewish religious service to its very core.” To Sachs, the utilization of an organ crossed the line between cosmetic reform and halakha, and he feared the service would turn into a theatrical performance.<sup>100</sup>

Voices like that of Sachs, however, were “muted, because it was not what people wanted to hear,”<sup>101</sup> something the petitions only confirmed. What many chose to hear instead was the message of Abraham Geiger, who would be appointed chief rabbi of

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<sup>100</sup> CAHJP - D/Be4/190: “Über die Prinzipien der jüdischen Reformgemeinde zu Berlin” (1862), 8.

<sup>101</sup> Abraham Berliner, “Literar-geschichtliche Belege über die christliche Orgel im jüdischen Gottesdienste,” in *Zur Lehr und zur Wehr über und gegen die kirchliche Orgel im jüdischen Gottesdienste* (Berlin: Rathausen & Lamm, 1904), 49. This pamphlet is owned by the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana: Broch. Ros. N.a. 25.

Berlin in 1869. He fiercely criticized Sachs and others for their alleged conservatism: “The discarding of kaftans and high, furry hats, the disposing of skirts of European cut, and similar attempts to imitate [non-Jews] – you all frowned upon it! And these narrow-minded and cloistered views are supposed to save Judaism! A new synagogue in Berlin without an organ is to proclaim a verdict of condemnation on the community or perhaps on Judaism itself!”<sup>102</sup> Geiger, who made this somewhat dramatic statement in 1861, considered an organ an absolute necessity in German Jewry’s path to modernization. To build a monumental synagogue in the center of Berlin without one was to deny, even erase, all the efforts that had been made toward achieving that goal.

Besides the ambiguous status of the organ vis-à-vis *halakhah*, the traditionalists voiced two additional objections. The first concerned the organ’s Christian associations. For many Jews it was impossible to disassociate this instrument from the Christian church; for them, an organ in the synagogue meant importing a Christian tradition that had no place in Jewish worship. Where else but in church did Christians use an organ?, asked one opponent, who denounced it as a “thoroughly Christian instrument” and who accredited its popularity among Jewish progressives as a temporary fashion frenzy [*Modewuth*]. David Deutsch, a rabbi in Sohrau, agreed and asked: “When, in the middle of the night and in an unfamiliar place, one hears the sounds of an organ, there will be not one moment of doubt; one believes one is in the vicinity of a Christian church.” Placing an organ in a Jewish house of worship was consequently a sign of imitation, of mimicking Christians, and many found this inappropriate in the realm of religion. Adopting a thoroughly Christian element into its midst would permanently alter the character of the synagogue and transform an inherently Jewish space. The German

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 49.

theologian and historian Abraham Berliner had seen this “Verchristlichung des jüdischen Gottesdienst” in Seesen, where Israel Jacobson had been so obsessed with “making an impression on Christian society” and with his own “vanity,” that he had transformed the synagogue into a church.<sup>103</sup>

Some opponents included comments from well-known Jews to strengthen their claims. The poet and writer Ludwig August Frankl, for instance, related how he had discussed the matter with Giacomo Meyerbeer of Berlin in the spring of 1856. Frankl had approached the well-known Jewish composer for advice on a suitable psalm composition for the inauguration of a synagogue in Vienna. Apparently Meyerbeer shared Frankl’s dislike of instrumental music in houses of worship: “In the present Dome, here in Berlin, in the metropolis of Protestantism, I have insisted on banning an organ because the choirs in and of themselves are a tremendous force . . . The organ is Christianity in sound, just as Gothic architecture is Christianity in brick.”<sup>104</sup> To ignore the opinion of a great virtuoso like Meyerbeer on musical matters, wrote Frankel, would be “laughable.” Indeed, Meyerbeer’s comments only confirmed the close link between organs and the Christian faith, which rendered their introduction into synagogues that much more problematic.

An anonymous contributor to the *AZdJ*, however, disagreed and rejected the explanations presented by the conservatives. Not only had organ-type instruments been used in ancient times, there were also many Christian denominations, such as the Quakers and Greek-Orthodox, that chose not to use organs in their houses of worship. “They are as much a Jewish as a Christian instrument,” he argued, “and if we want to give our

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<sup>103</sup> Berliner, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Ludwig August Frankl, “Die Orgel in der Synagoge,” *Ben Chananja* 4 (1861): 215.



religion a healthy future, we have to include this mode of elevation.”<sup>105</sup> Similar to the question of legality, the organ’s alleged Christian origins and connotations generated mixed responses.

A second problem surrounding the organ concerned not so much the instrument itself or its permissibility with respect to religious law as it did the audience, the members of the congregation. Sachs and others feared that an organ would cause disputes and permanent rifts in the *Gemeinde*, thereby undermining communal unity. Having proponents and opponents of reform attend different synagogues in such close vicinity would undeniably lead to tensions. However, not everyone found this “split” problematic. One contributor to the *AZdJ* thought it rather convenient that “each could visit the house of worship in which he believes himself best able to satisfy his religious needs” and argued that “any strife over a religious institution is very much out of place.” There was room for everyone: for reformed Jews in the Johannisstraße, for orthodox Jews in the Heidereutergasse, and for moderate progressives in the Oranienburgerstraße. What would be the harm in having those in favor of an organ congregate in the new building while its opponents gathered in the old synagogue? To this author a difference in preference did not automatically mean an irrevocable schism in the community.

In January 1862, the executive committee published a *Schriftstück* on the organ debate with contributions from a variety of religious authorities, including the *Rabbinats-Assessoren* Elhanan Rosenstein and Michael Sachs, Abraham Geiger (then rabbi in Breslau), rabbi Julius Landsberger of Darmstadt, Ludwig Philippson of Magdeburg, and Joseph Maier of Stuttgart. Presenting the pros and cons of so-called *Orgelsynagogen*,

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<sup>105</sup> “Gutachten über die Zulässigkeit der Orgel in die Synagoge,” *AZdJ* 25, no. 48 (November 26, 1861): 687.

they concluded that the introduction of an organ could not be opposed on halachic grounds.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, most agreed that instrumental music contributed to the glorification [*Verherrlichung*] of the service, but that its use should be limited in order to prevent turning the synagogue into a spectacle [*Schauspielwesen*]. Contrary to what some historians have argued, Sachs was not against the organ per se; what he opposed were the terms on which it was used. He objected to instrumental music played on the Sabbath and the High Holidays, precisely on the days when most Jews visited the synagogue. While he acknowledged its edifying qualities, he still considered the organ an un-Jewish importation and therefore suspect, especially on the most holy days of the Jewish calendar. When the *AZdJ* reported in June, 1863, that the executive committee had decided to install an organ in the new synagogue, Sachs was in reluctant agreement.

Once it became clear that the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue would introduce an organ, the debate took on a different dimension by centering on the topic of visibility, on whether a Jew or a Christian should play the instrument on the Sabbath and on Festivals, and on the type of music to be performed. One observer proposed an audible but invisible organ. The instrument would be perceived as “less Christian” and less “church-like” if it was placed in the female section, thereby integrating its function into the synagogue without a visible or aesthetic presence. It would be even better, added our observer, if the craftsman who designed the organ was able to alter the sound in such a way that “the

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<sup>106</sup> CAHJP: D/Be4/190: “Über die Prinzipien der jüdischen Reformgemeinde zu Berlin” (January 28, 1862): 1-12. “Gegen die Orgeleinführung überhaupt wird auf Ritualgründen von keinen der besorgten theologischen [Sachverständigen] ein Einwand erhoben; direct oder indirect bestätigen dieselben vielmehr sämtlich auss ein Verbot der Orgel den sonstigen instrumentalen Begleitung das gottesdienstlichen Gesang in den Synagogen nirgend klar ausgesprochen, nirgend codifizirt ist . . . Somit bekundet Herr Dr. Sachs – was noch allen historischen Überlieferungen allerdings unzweifelhaft versteht -- dass die Instrumentalmusik nicht nur kein fremdes, sondern vielmehr das ureigene Medium zur Verherrlichung das jüdischen Gottesdienses ist, welches demselbern nur in den Zeiten schwarzer Leiden und großen Bedwängniss abhanden gekommen war. Nicht also eine Neuerung, sondern nur eine Rückkehr zu den ursprünglichen Kultusformen wurden die Einführung der Orgel bewirken.”

tunes seemed to come from outside the synagogue,” thereby creating an acoustic illusion that rendered the presence of an organ less troublesome.<sup>107</sup> The executive committee called this argument a “*geistreich erdachten Auswege*,” a clever legitimization, but it did not believe female congregants would appreciate sitting a mere ten feet away from such a powerful instrument.

Most commentators expected the organ to have a visible and an audible presence, although they disagreed on who was to assume the role of playing it. The 1862 *Schriftstück* of the executive committee proposed appointing a Christian on the Sabbath and on Festivals because it was forbidden for a Jew to perform work on those days. The contemporary Emil Breslau, however, a pianist by profession, found this inappropriate as Christians lacked the necessary “spirit and feeling”; it would be too “mechanical.”<sup>108</sup> Marcus Lehmann agreed. Is it really conceivable, he asked, to have a non-believer lead this part of the service? If one asked a non-Jew whether one of us could play *his* organ in church, it would be considered absurd. “Never could music played by a Christian in the synagogue have any religious character! . . . Everything that is offered to God has to remain pure and refrain from contact with other religions, which means a non-Jew can on no account have any function in a Jewish service.”<sup>109</sup> The de-Christianization of the organ in order to legitimize its installation and use would be completely undermined by having a Christian play the instrument on the most holy day of the week.

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<sup>107</sup> This anecdote is related by Abraham Berliner in his “Literar-geschichtliche Belege über die christliche Orgel im jüdischen Gottesdienste,” in *Zur Lehr und Zur Wehr*, 45.

<sup>108</sup> Emil Breslau, “Zur Berliner Orgelfrage,” *AZdJ* 27: 23 (June 2, 1863): 356-57.

<sup>109</sup> Marcus Lehmann, *Die Orgel in der Synagoge: Eine Zeitfrage* (Mainz: Verlag der Le Roux’schen Hofbuchhandlung). This pamphlet is owned by Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana in Amsterdam: Br. Ros. 1888 H22. Excerpts of Lehmann’s essay were published in *Der Israelit* in the 1860s.

The organ was eventually installed and was played on the Sabbath and on Festivals. Sachs disagreed with the latter decision and eventually resigned over the matter, after which Joseph Aub assumed his post as chief rabbi of Berlin – a development that shows religious leaders enjoyed significantly less power and authority in Berlin than they did in London. The *AZdJ* reported that, “in order to keep the peace,” a Christian named Schwantzer had been appointed organist, who apparently also played at the Reform synagogue in the Johannisstraße on Sundays.<sup>110</sup> Of course these public debates were not just about the organ; the organ was a symbol for the religious, social, and cultural reforms that were permanently changing the character of German Jewry. It stood at the center of the question of “what to keep and what to permit in order to be faithful to Judaism and simultaneously to follow the cultural development and the realities of life.”<sup>111</sup> The anxieties over the organ were therefore anxieties over modernization, over the transformation of time-honored customs and rituals. More and more the synagogue lost its traditional meaning, that of a *mikdash me’at*, a small sanctuary that served as a substitute for the ancient temple in Jerusalem. Instead, it became a sanctuary in its own right, a place where the references to Zion were no longer uttered and where Jews were mimicking Christians. “Herein lies the crux of the matter” [*der gordische Knoten*], concluded David Oppenheim in the early sixties. “While it is true that the synagogue, as ‘a small sanctuary,’ is a representation of the Temple; according to the prevailing ideas there is no longer any correlation.”<sup>112</sup> The very nature and purpose of the synagogue was

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<sup>110</sup> Breslauer apparently applied for the position of organist but was not hired. “Der Unterzeichnete,” he wrote, “der einzige jüdische Bewerber um die Organisten Stelle hat nicht das Glück gehabt dieselbe zu erlangen, da man um des lieben Friedens willen Anstand genommen hat sie einem Juden zu geben.” See *AZdJ* 30: 34 (August 21, 1866): 535-536.

<sup>111</sup> “Die Reform im Judenthume,” *AZdJ* 26, no. 35 (August 26, 1862): 483-486.

<sup>112</sup> Oppenheim is quoted in A. Berliner’s *Zur Lehr und zur Mehr über und gegen die kirchliche Orgel im jüdischen Gottesdienste* (Berlin: Rathausen & Lamm, 1904), 27.

in transformation and its increasing disconnection from Jerusalem, from time-honored rituals, from Orthodoxy, caused many to express concern.

The synagogue interior thus constituted a space in which Berlin Jews mediated their identity, both as Jews and as Germans. By introducing the organ, they met contemporary standards of religious respectability and satisfied the demands of many congregants to “elevate” the service. The community could demonstrate that it had modernized Judaism, that it had created a space equally devoted to the virtues of religion, cultural refinement, and moral edification [*Erbauung*]. Yet by making the organ invisible to the naked eye, and by avoiding the Christian tradition of giving organs aesthetic centrality, they ensured the visual authority of Jewish features. The dominant interior feature of the synagogue remained the ark, a Jewish symbol, not a Christian one. The debates in the early 1860s do show, however, that these negotiations over Jewish representation were by no means set in stone or agreed upon.

Similar negotiations over synagogue design and Jewish representation occurred with respect to the seating arrangements for women. Traditionally females, if they attended services, sat in separate sections, usually in women’s galleries alongside the northern and southern walls of the main prayer room. With the construction of the new synagogue, however, the question of mixed seating and family pews surfaced. One participant in the debate argued that separate seating was a thing of the past. Not only would the isolation of women in the rearmost pews encourage inattentiveness and boredom, as they would be unable to see the service, it would also thwart religious etiquette: “The supervision of women and the safeguarding of the necessary silence is impossible because often all sorts of profane conversations are going on, disturbing those

who do pay attention.”<sup>113</sup> Moreover, argued the author, the galleries prevented women from actively participating in the service. The interior design of the synagogue was to be purposeful and expedient [*zweckmäßig*], and with regard to women’s seating this meant inviting wives to sit downstairs. After all, “the experience of modern times has taught us how truly important is the cultivation of the female sex for the preservation and promotion of Judaism . . . we should not shy away from taking the next step and from granting women in the synagogue an equally comfortable and edifying place as men.” He did not, however, advocate that the sexes sit next to each other, but rather that the main floor be divided into two equal halves, the left side for men, the right side for women. The balconies could function as “reserve spaces for young independents, boys and girls, also divided into equal halves.” That the presence of the unmarried on the balconies, facing each other, would probably only multiply the number of profane conversations did not occur to the author.

This solution, he continued, would cause women to feel that they too belonged in the synagogue. This would not only encourage them to attend services more diligently but would also bestow a higher degree of religiosity on the Jewish community as a whole. Even more, it rendered the need for supervision of women no longer necessary. Their visibility, in other words, would ensure proper behavior. The building committee, however, while in accord with the author’s reasoning, rejected the proposal. Inviting women to sit on the main floor and leaving the balconies largely unused significantly reduced the building’s seating capacity. Moreover, mixed seating veered too close to radical Reform. Here, too, as with the organ, community leaders compromised. They maintained the Jewish tradition of separate seating, but they allowed the removal of any

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<sup>113</sup> “Über die Frauenplätze in der Synagoge,” *AZdJ* 28: 4 (January 19, 1864): 49-50.

latticework that obstructed women's view. Female worshippers were visible to men and vice versa. Improvements were made, but they were to harmonize rather than replace time-honored Jewish traditions with contemporary cultural codes.

These reforms had a long-term impact on modern synagogue design. The architect had to incorporate space for a choir, for an organ, for a stage-like platform with a lectern, for marriage ceremonies – the new synagogue contained a *Trausaal*, a wedding room, on the west side of the ark – and for a large vestibule where male and female congregants could mingle after the service. In Berlin and elsewhere, then, the community synagogue adapted to the religious, cultural, and social needs of its bourgeois audience. It became a space where Jews mediated and displayed their identity both as Germans and as Jews. That not everyone understood or accepted this hybridity will be the topic of our next discussion.

*Überall, wo es gibt zu sehen und zu hören,  
Scheint die Zahl der Juden sich täglich zu mehren.  
In Promenaden, Theatern, Concerten und Bällen,  
Siehst du meist Juden in allen Fällen.  
Willst du wo mehr Christen als Juden seh'n,  
Mußt du Freitag Abend in 'die neue Synagoge' gehen.<sup>114</sup>*

### **Responses to the Oranienburgerstraße Synagogue**

This short poem appeared in the *Wochenschrift* some years after the inauguration of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue. It commented, in a somewhat derisive tone, on the increasing visibility of the Jews in Berlin, who were apparently “everywhere one looks and listens.” Although exaggerated, the author was correct in recognizing that growing

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<sup>114</sup> *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* 17: 43 (May 3, 1872). The Dutch-Jewish periodical *Weekblad voor Israëlieten* copied this short poem from the German *Wochenschrift*. It translates to: “Everywhere you look and listen, the number of Jews appears to be multiplying daily. In promenades, theaters, , concerts, and balls; the majority is Jewish. If you want to see more Christians than Jews, then go to ‘the new synagogue’ on Friday evening.”

numbers of bourgeois Jews attended cultural events and participated in popular social rituals, including that of parading Berlin's fashionable promenades and attending musical and theatrical performances. The latter, after all, had adopted middle-class patterns of behavior and enjoyed the same types of leisure and entertainment as German gentiles. However, suggests the author, there was still one place where the majority of the audience was Christian, namely the new synagogue.

We know from newspaper and travel accounts that many Christians visited the new synagogue. They were curious about the new landmark that had taken seven years to be completed and that looked so different from anything they had seen before. Reporters described the building and the inaugural events in local newspapers, architectural theorists analyzed its interior and exterior design in building journals, and foreign visitors commented on the high level of decorum and religious reform, which struck many (especially foreign Jews) as excessive. In almost all of these accounts, the building proved to have an overwhelming effect on Christian observers. They were impressed with its magnitude, its advanced lighting system, its solemnity. The *National Zeitung*, for instance, stated that "the new house of worship is the pride of the Jewish community of Berlin; but even more, it is an ornament to the city, one of the most remarkable creations of modern architecture in the Moorish style, and one of the most distinguished construction projects that the northern German royal capital has carried out in recent years."<sup>115</sup> An editorial in *Urania*, a contemporary Christian music magazine, urged readers to visit the synagogue and listen to its organ. The beauty of its sound was surpassed only by "the sublimity of the temple [as a whole], the likes of which you won't

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<sup>115</sup> *National Zeitung* (September 6, 1866).



find anywhere else.”<sup>116</sup> From an architectural perspective, then, the synagogue was a grand success.

A closer look at the discourse surrounding the building, however, reveals an ambiguous side to the positive reception. The language used to describe the synagogue, for instance, has both an inclusionary and exclusionary quality. Gentiles generally hailed the new addition to the urban scene and praised the Jews’ architectural achievement, but they also viewed the synagogue as a verification of the Jews’ perpetual difference. The building was exotic and magical, and therefore inherently un-German. The synagogue was a “fairy-tale building,” wrote the *National Zeitung*, “that “leads us into the fantastic wonder of modern Alhambra with all the thousand-fold magic of the Moorish style.”<sup>117</sup> It was an aesthetic confirmation, initiated by the Berlin *Gemeinde* itself, that German Jews were not part of the *Volk*. The numerous references to the “magic” of the building suggest that gentiles perceived the scene as utterly foreign, as a fantasy. This was precisely what Jewish architects such as Edwin Oppler had been trying to avoid, namely the emerging reputation of synagogues – and Jews themselves – as a foreign element in the German national body. Oppler considered the “unrestrained fantasy” in synagogue architecture only justified when one wanted to make an “anti-Christian” statement, the last thing German Jews should do considering their still undetermined political status.<sup>118</sup> A Moorish style building thus sent the wrong message. The reality, after all, was that Christian

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<sup>116</sup> “Die Orgel der neuen Synagoge,” *Urania: Musik-Zeitschrift für Alle, welche das Wohl der Kirche besonders zu fördern haben* (1866): 162-165. According to the *Jewish Messenger* the new synagogue became a new tourist attraction: “Visitors attend the service precisely as they visit the palaces and museums – it is a spectacle that must be witnessed if one wishes to see Berlin.”

<sup>117</sup> *National Zeitung*.... The *Vossische Zeitung* and the *Bauzeitung*, too, described the building as “magical” and “fantastic.” (see H-S 48- 49).

<sup>118</sup> Harold Hammer-Schenk, “Edwin Oppler's Theorie des Synagogenbaus. Emanzipationsversuch durch Architektur,” in *Hannoversche Geschichtsblätter* (1979): 99-117.

society would not accept Jews who proclaimed themselves to be Germans but who represented themselves publicly as strangers.

Indeed, one might argue that Christian observers responded favorably to the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue precisely because they perceived the Jews as different from themselves; stylistically the building met their expectations. Prevailing stereotypes about the Jews' character, after all, corresponded to those identified with oriental architecture. In 1866, *Der Taunusbote* directly linked the oriental design of the new building with the character of Arabs and Jews alike: "The fantasy of [Moorish] architecture is infinite, which is disruptive when one needs to include explicit forms. Herein lies the relationship of the Jewish character with that of the Arabs . . . Their fantasy is drawn to the arbitrary, to the unrestrained, to fairy tales, something that is reflected in their architecture."<sup>119</sup> Both Jews and Arabs, claimed the author, were nomads, *semitische Gruppen* lacking a national style and so their capricious artistic expressions were but a natural outcome. The Berlin *Gemeinde* chose the Moorish style for their synagogue at a time when German society at large was trying to define "Germanness," when the qualities associated with the oriental aesthetic – arbitrariness, leisure, decadence, irreligiosity – were precisely the ones furthest removed from the German ideal. Prussians could thus admire the architectural sophistication of this landmark, but it was an architecture that affirmed and reinforced the Jews' separation rather than their integration into German culture.

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<sup>119</sup> The article from *Der Taunusbote* was reprinted in the *AZdJ*. See "Über Bauwesen und Musik zu jüdischen gottesdienstlichen Zwecken," *AZdJ* 31: 1 (January 1, 1867): 5-8. Eduard Knoblauch, too, proclaimed that he was designing a synagogue for the "großen, national abgeschlossenen Gemeinschaft," that large, nationally isolated community, the Jews. See L.P., "Carl Heinrich Eduard Knoblauch," *Zeitschrift für Praktische Baukunst* (1865), 301.

The new building also had its critics. The synagogue's beauty and public presence, argued some, put Christian churches in a bad light. Christians compared the house of worship to their own and often the differences in size, decoration, and public attention generated envy and resentment. The comparison of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue to Protestant churches, reported the *Deutsche Bauzeitung* in 1867, "was not a favorable one. The modern Protestant church is not a particularly magnificent monument and the brilliance of the Jewish temple has already produced in some pious hearts sighs and annoyances" [*Seufzen und Ärgerissen*]. Here, too, gentiles responded positively to the building itself, admiring its "worth and beauty," but they ultimately translated these responses into an interpretation that did not enhance public opinion about Jews.

An interesting, although not necessarily representative, case is that of Heinrich von Treitschke. Known for his zealous nationalism and anti-Jewish sentiments, the historian wrote to his wife that he saw the golden dome of the synagogue glimmering in the sunset while on his way home. He admitted to her that he found it "a beautiful building, immensely rich . . . the architecture of which is so fine as this ugly, uninspiring style can be." It was indeed, wrote Treitschke, "the richest and largest of Berlin's 'churches'!"<sup>120</sup> Yet Treitschke could not associate the Jews' architectural display with religious respectability and cultural sophistication. Instead, the only way he knew how to interpret it was by placing the building in the historical context he had created for himself, which meant that the synagogue was a visual testimony to the Jews' growing power and wealth. In an essay entitled "Herr Graetz und sein Judentum" (1879), Treitschke concluded that

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<sup>120</sup> Von Treitsche wrote this letter April 28, 1871. See Heinrich von Treitschke, *Deutsche Kämpfe, neue Folge: Schriften zur Tagespolitik* (Leipzig, 1896): 321.

if one notes the characteristic fact that the most beautiful and splendid house of worship in the German capital is a synagogue (which one cannot blame on the Jews but on the Christians), then it virtually cannot be denied that the Jews are more powerful in Germany than in any other Western European country.

The implication was that if Christians allowed the Jews certain liberties, then the latter would exploit these liberties to the fullest – as the construction of this magnificent synagogue confirmed – at which point the Jews would reveal the extent of their power and influence. That synagogues were actually much smaller and more modest in places where the Jews enjoyed full civil rights, as in Amsterdam and London, and that the “power” of Berlin Jewry was quite minimal, did not enter Treitschke’s mind.

Over the course of the 1880s and 1890s, when anti-Jewish rethoric became socially acceptable, it became increasingly clear that the Moorish-style had not been the wisest choice. This does not mean that Jews in Berlin believed an alternative style would have reduced antisemitic criticism. It does mean that some Jews recognized the conspicuous presence of this much-loved and admired building did not help their cause. Rabbi Max Grunwald, the founder of the Society for Jewish Ethnology, concluded that “to the extent the (mainly Christian) builders wanted to bring out the ‘Oriental’ in Judaism, they have unintentionally earned the thanks of the enemies of the Jews.”<sup>121</sup> The synagogue was too easy a target for people such as Treitschke and Lagarde, who were unable and unwilling to accept the Jews’ argument that Judaism was only a denomination, one part of their otherwise German identity.

One consequence of a changing political climate and the rising antipathy towards the Jews was the return to building in an inconspicuous style. While some Jewish communities, for example in Nuremberg (1874) and in Heilbronn (1877), continued to

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<sup>121</sup> Rabbi Max Grunwald published “How are syn. built?” in 1901 in the *AZdJ*. Quoted in Simon, 10.

build monumental, Moorish-inspired synagogues – these two buildings were again designed by a Christian architect, Adolf Wolff – the height of Oriental synagogue architecture in Germany had passed. In its stead came a preference for the more common Romanesque style or for eclectic blends, both of which softened the visual particularism of Jewish houses of worship. As for Berlin, it witnessed an expansion of the number of private synagogues in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, mostly due to the continuing growth of the community. In 1880 some 53,916 Jews lived in Berlin (4.8 percent of the city population), a number that grew to 79,286 in 1890 (5.02 percent) and 92,206 in 1900 (4.8 percent).<sup>122</sup> No longer obligated to be members of the *Gemeinde*, many founded independent congregations, each of which erected a synagogue of its own. These buildings were, understandably, smaller in size than the communal synagogues. It is remarkable, however, how utterly different these structures were. While they were erected in the Jewish neighborhood, the synagogues of the 1880s and 1890s were once again unassuming, located in back yards, surrounded by residential homes so as to shield them from public view, and completely unrecognizable as religious structures.

That many of these additional synagogues belonged to Orthodox congregations partially explains their modesty. Many Orthodox Jews, especially recent immigrants, felt uncomfortable with the liberal tendencies displayed in the main community synagogues, certainly the one in the Oranienburgerstraße but equally in the “old” Heidereutergasse building. The changing political climate, the growing land prices of first-class locations in the city center, and perhaps the Orthodox practice of celebrating Judaism in the private rather than the public realm, caused synagogues to again retreat into the shadows. The

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<sup>122</sup> Numbers given by Hammer-Schenk in *Architektur*, 213. Much of this increase was attributable to immigration, both from rural areas in East-Prussia (such as Posen) and Russia. These immigrants settled predominantly in Scheunenviertel, in the Mitte district.

newly constructed buildings at Kaiserstraße no. 29 (1869) and at Schöneberg Ufer no. 26 (1876) were adequate but architecturally unremarkable.

The same is true for the synagogue of *Adass Jisroel*, the Orthodox congregation that seceded from the main community in 1869 in response to the liberalization of the Berlin *Gemeinde* (fig. 8). The building, located in Gipsstraße 12a, was inaugurated in 1873. The initial premises must have been located in a residential building as the 1874 Berlin street registry lists, in addition to the name of the synagogue, the names of other residents living at number 12a: a Dr. Berliner, a civil servant named Hofenfelder, a merchant named Lesser, a plumber named Lewin, two mechanics by the name of Martm [sic], a tailor named Stier, and a book-editor named Wunder.<sup>123</sup> A 1904 pamphlet recounting the short history of Adass Jisroel described the synagogue as an “unostentatious place for prayer” [*punklose Gebetsstätte*].<sup>124</sup> The congregation used this synagogue for almost thirty years, after which the congregation moved to the Artilleriestraße 31 in 1903, today the Tucholskystraße 40.

We also know of hevra synagogues in Almstadtstrasse, Kleine Augustrasse, Grenadierstrasse, Brunnenstrasse, and Rosenstraße (figs. 9 and 10). Perhaps the Orthodox hevrot *Schochare Hatow* and *Kahal Jisrael* congregated in these streets – one Dutch Jewish newspaper reported that the former convened in “a former warehouse” during the

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<sup>123</sup> Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin: Häuserverzeichnis nach Straßen, Ge Eintrag Nr. 4, 1874, p. 111.

<sup>124</sup> *Die Israelitische Synagogengemeinde (Adass Jisroel) zu Berlin: Ein Rückblick* (Berlin: Verlag von Rathausen & Lamm, 1904), 18. This pamphlet is owned by the Landesarchiv Berlin: Soz. 533. The congregation had first convened at Bisschofstrasse 25, at the home of Israel Kessler, after which they moved to Neue Friedrich-Strasse 29. Members raised some 20,000 Thaler for the construction of a new synagogue, but apparently the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 “paralyzed all their efforts.” They bought the house in the Gipsstrasse 12a instead. In the late 1890s, the congregation received a legacy of 250,000 Deutschmark from one of its members, Israel Kessler. It bought the property at the Artilleriestrasse 32 for 350,000 Mark and built a synagogue that offered seats for 450 men and 350 women.

1860s, although it does not list the address or describe the building.<sup>125</sup> The 1862 bylaws only reveal that the congregation paid 631 thaler in annual rent.<sup>126</sup> Not much is known about these small synagogues; most of them have long since disappeared and both written and visual documentation is scarce.

Outside of the Mitte district a number of synagogues emerged around the turn of the century as a response to the growing numbers of middle- and upper middle class Jews moving to upscale neighborhoods. A liberal congregation in Kreuzberg inaugurated a new house of worship at Lindenstraße 48-50. The building, designed by Cremer and Wolffenstein in a red brick neo-Romanesque design, was located in a courtyard and provided space for some 1,800 worshippers. The inconspicuous anterior housed a religious school and various community apartments and social institutions, obscuring the prayer room tucked away in the back of the building. The Tiergarten district in west Berlin saw the construction of the Lützowstrasse synagogue (fig. 12). Built in 1898, also by Cremer and Wolffenstein, this red brick building with neo-Gothic overtones featured a cross-shaped floor plan and an organ, and seated approximately 1,900 worshipers. Similar to the liberal Lindenstraße synagogue, the Lützowstrasse building was hidden in the back of a courtyard while the front of the building housed a school and apartments. The function of both buildings thus remained indistinct. In the case of the Tiergarten community this architectural modesty was enforced by the *Baupolizei* [the building authorities] of Berlin, who demanded a revision of the original design plans. Whether out

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<sup>125</sup> C., “Brieven uit Duitsland I: Over de toestand der Israëlietische gemeente Berlijn,” *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 2: 18 (November 30, 1866): 3-4. For the communal regulation of the hebra, see *Erneuerte Statuten des Wohltätigkeitsbeförderungs-Verein Schochare Hatow* (Berlin: M. D. Löbell, 1862). This little booklet is owned by the CAHJP: D/Be4/389.

<sup>126</sup> Stiftung Neue Synagoge – Centrum Judaicum Berlin: 75A Be no. 296 (id. Nr. 526): *Revidirtes Statut des Wohlthätigkeits-Beförderungs-Vereins שוהרי הטוב* (Berlin: Druck von Albert Lewent, 1868).

of dissatisfaction with the Jews' visual presence in Tiergarten, envy, or antisemitism, the authorities insisted that the height of the façade be lowered, the external ornamentation be less pronounced, and the gable simplified – conditions the building committee eventually accepted. This made it painfully clear that the days of the 1860s were over.

For much of the nineteenth century, all of Berlin's communal synagogues were situated in Mitte, which remained the center of Jewish life. Not until the early twentieth century, much later than in London, did a noticeable movement occur and did the gravity of Jewish life shift westward, symbolized by the construction of the liberal Fasanenstraße synagogue in Charlottenburg in 1912. Indeed, stated Steven Lowenstein, by this time west Berlin was “no longer an area where one could escape Jewishness.”<sup>127</sup> Surprisingly, then, while the Berlin Jewish community differed substantially from that of Amsterdam with regard to socio-economic status, communal prosperity, intellectual productivity, and ideological ambitions, they shared demographic patterns and a preference for residential concentration. Organized Jewish life remained almost exclusively concentrated in the old neighborhood, which expanded, not unlike an ink pattern, its borders as the community increased in number. For much of the nineteenth century the majority population both in Amsterdam and Berlin thus remained closely tied to the Jewish neighborhood, attended synagogue there, built communal facilities there – although a hospital took precedence over a new synagogue in the Dutch capital – and lived in economically-mixed streets. Neither one of these neighborhoods were stigmatized at the time, and although it was recognized that both included problem areas – the nearby Scheunenviertel in particular became renowned for its overpopulation and dilapidation by the turn of the century – these areas did not represent the Jewish districts as a whole. When the Oranieburger-

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<sup>127</sup> Steven M. Lowenstein, “Jewish Residential Concentration in Post-Emancipation Germany,” 484.



strasse synagogue was finally completed, it was recognized as the visual embodiment of a dynamic religious and cultural center.

## **Conclusion**

Sigmund Freud once spoke of the “narcissism of minor differences,” referring to the human tendency to emphasize the dissimilarities rather than the similarities between people.<sup>128</sup> The smaller the difference, the more we experience the urge to exaggerate it. According to Freud, this tendency formed the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between people who are actually very much alike. While psychoanalysis has not been our focus here, this theory rings true with respect to German-Jewish relations during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The majority of urban Jews had acculturated to such an extent that they looked, behaved, and considered themselves German. They dressed according to contemporary fashion, had adopted the do’s and don’ts of German *Bildung*, and they sent their children to German schools and universities. They prided themselves on being patriotic members of society who differed from their gentile neighbors only in their religious affiliation. To many Prussian gentiles, however, this “minor” difference remained an insurmountable obstacle and it continued to define the Jewish population as a *Volk* apart. Indeed, the fact that the difference between Jews and Christians was so small and increasingly invisible on the outside only increased suspicions. An unrecognizable Other, after all, was more threatening to a new German state than a conspicuous one. Although they tried much harder than their contemporaries in London and Amsterdam, Jews in Berlin were never able to acquire full membership in

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<sup>128</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: J. Cape & H. Smith, 1930).

German civil society. The irony here is that the Jews were expected to abandon their Jewishness and to become fully acculturated, but that they were repeatedly attacked for doing just that, being labeled as intruders who supposedly dominated the world of business and culture. Because, in the words of Michael Brenner, “the prerequisites for acceptance into German society were never clearly spelled out,”<sup>129</sup> Jews continued to face difficulties.

The Oranienburgerstraße synagogue exemplified both this quest for equality and its perpetual challenges. A product of its time, the building sought to give the religious domain of the Jews a distinct aesthetic while incorporating modern requirements. By integrating classical elements into the oriental exterior, by installing an organ behind the ark, by having a non-Jew play the instrument on Sabbath and the High Holidays, and by wearing fashionable top hats during services, members of the community proclaimed both their German *Verbürgerlichung* and their Jewishness, their acculturation and their distinctiveness. Many gentiles, however, were not able to accept this. They failed to make a distinction between the Jews’ religious affiliation and their loyalty to German culture and the Prussian state. While for many Jews the new synagogue thus visualized their dual identity, for local gentiles it only confirmed the Jews’ separatism. This does not mean that all gentiles harbored antisemitic sentiments and branded the Jews as enemies. It does mean that many had difficulty accepting their Jewish neighbor as fully equal. The reluctance to grant permission to build, the attempt to situate the new synagogue in the peripheral sections of the city, the absence of the question of why the Jews chose such an un-German design pattern, and the references to the “oriental character” of the Jews after

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<sup>129</sup> Michael Brenner “Between Revolution and Legal Equality,” in Michael A. Meyer (ed.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times. Vol. 2: Emancipation and Acculturation, 1780-1871* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 317.

the inauguration of the building all suggest that the latter were still considered strangers in their own city.

From a purely architecture standpoint, however, the synagogue was groundbreaking and widely admired. Its technological achievements, particularly with respect to the dome and the lighting system, its beautiful decorations, and its air of dignity impressed Jews and gentiles alike. Knoblauch had truly designed a *Prachttempel*, although the architect himself was not able to admire the fruits of his labor as he died during the years of construction. That its non-Jewish audience, from Bismarck to reporters to curious locals, remained reluctant to translate its admiration of the building to the people who built and used it, ultimately rendered the mission of Europe's largest and best-known synagogue only partially successful.

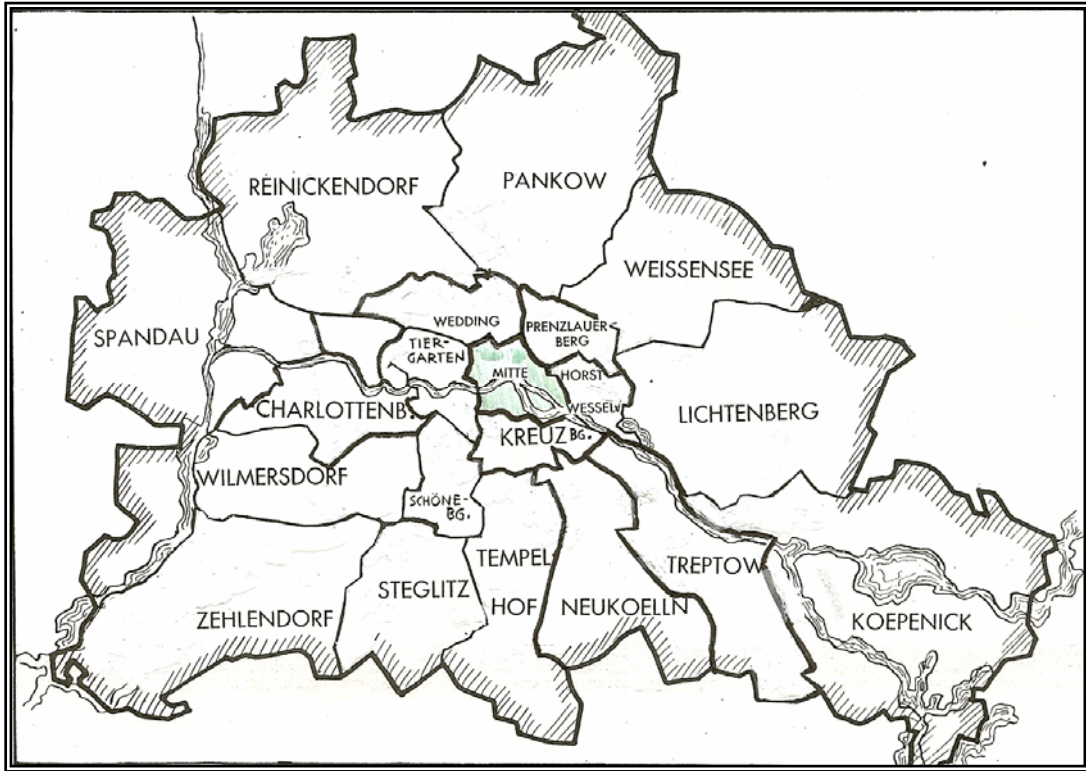
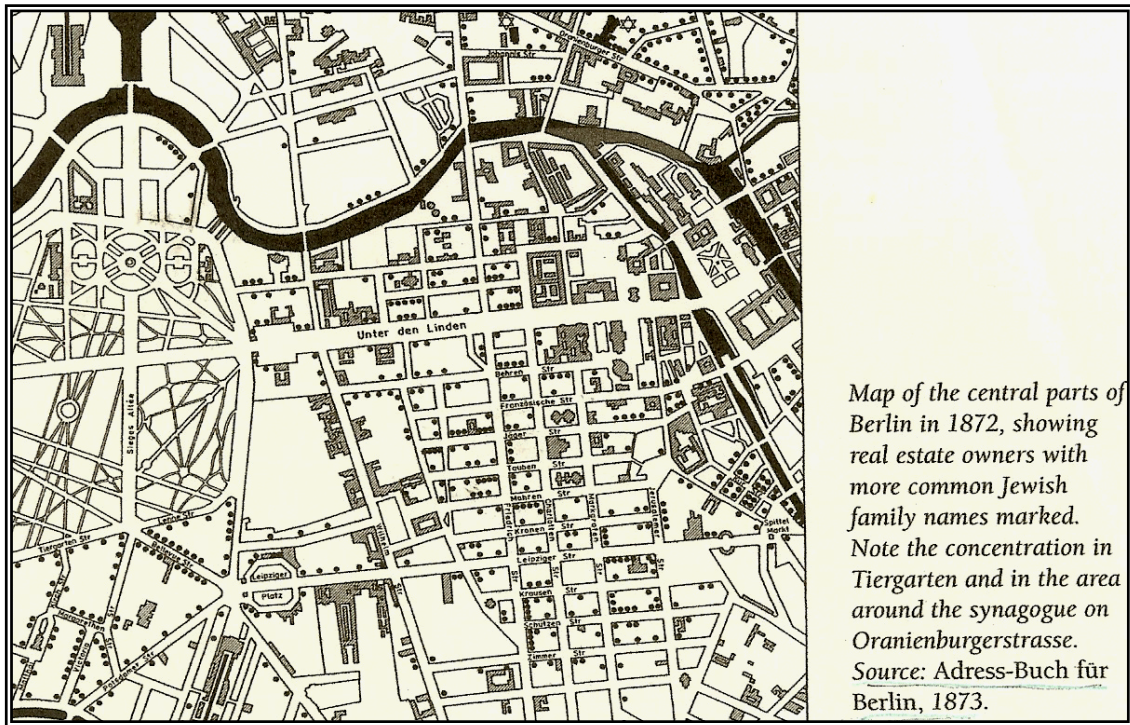


Fig. 47: Map Berlin (Berliner Adreßbuch für das Jahre 1938. Verlag August Scherl, 6)



Map of the central parts of Berlin in 1872, showing real estate owners with more common Jewish family names marked. Note the concentration in Tiergarten and in the area around the synagogue on Oranienburgerstrasse. Source: Adress-Buch für Berlin, 1873.

Fig. 48: Frederic Bedoire, *The Jewish Contribution to Modern Architecture 1830-1930* (KTAV, 2004), 242.

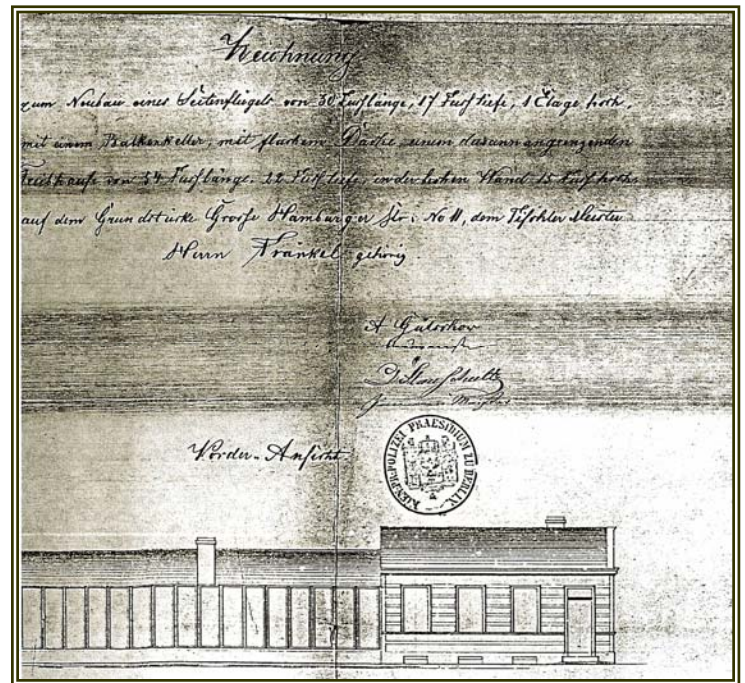
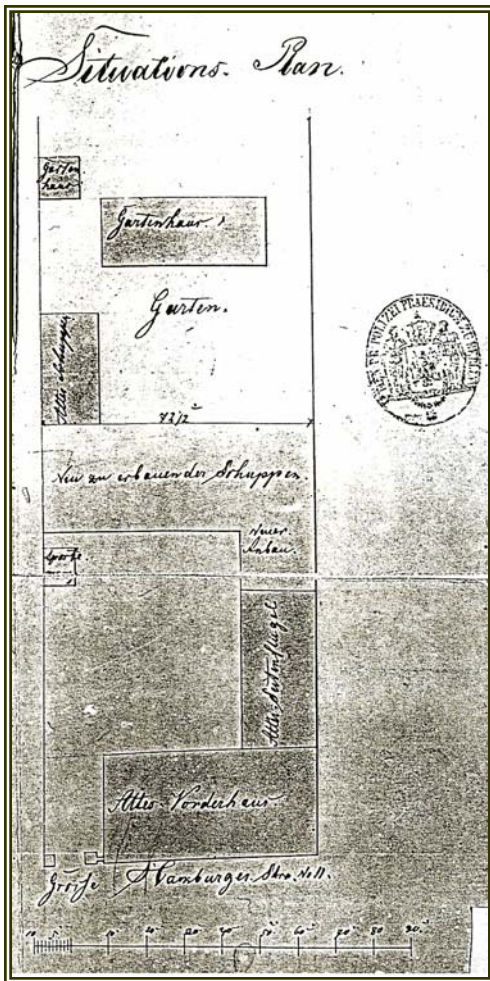
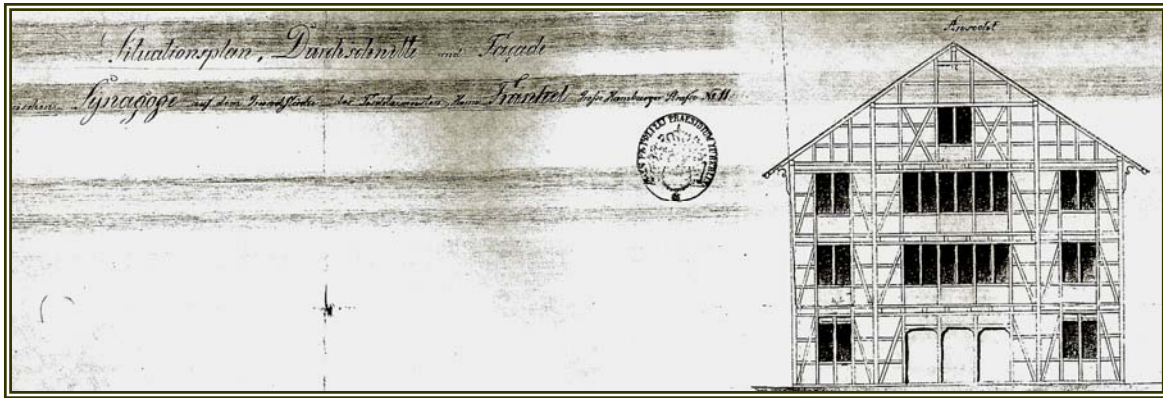


Fig. 49: Private Synagogue Große Hamburgerstraße no. 11, built by Fränkel. Drawings owned by the Landesarchiv in Berlin: A. Rep. 010-02, no. 2996

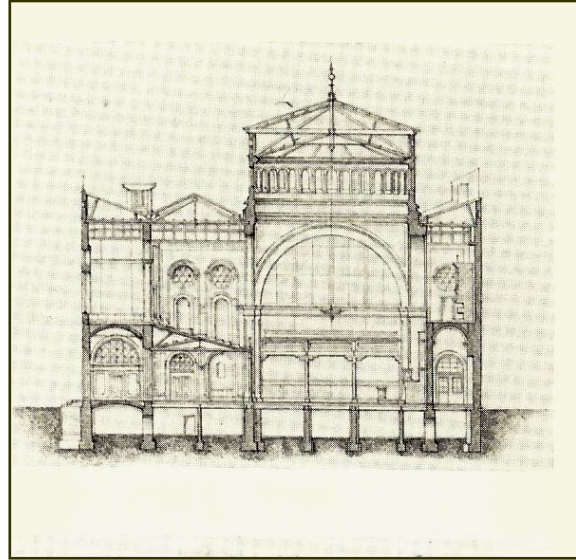
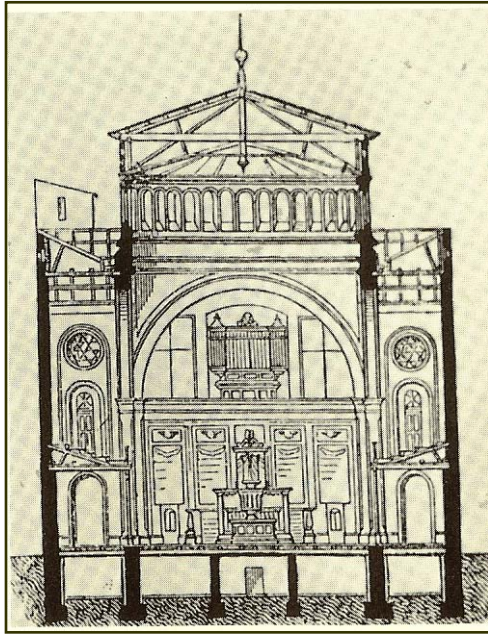
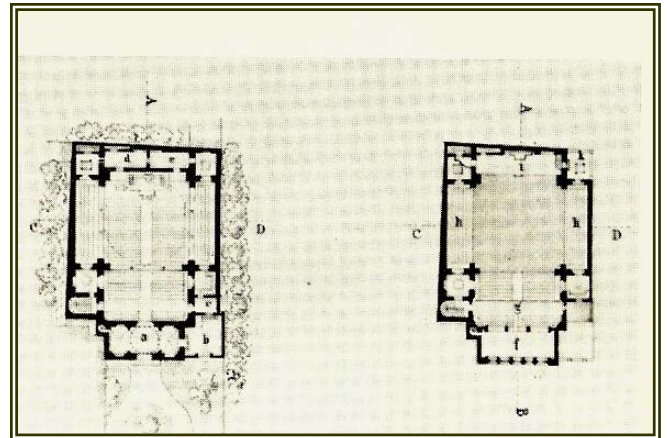
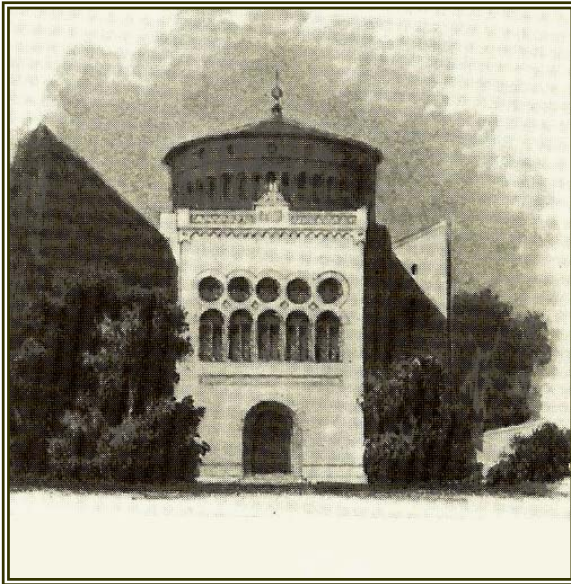
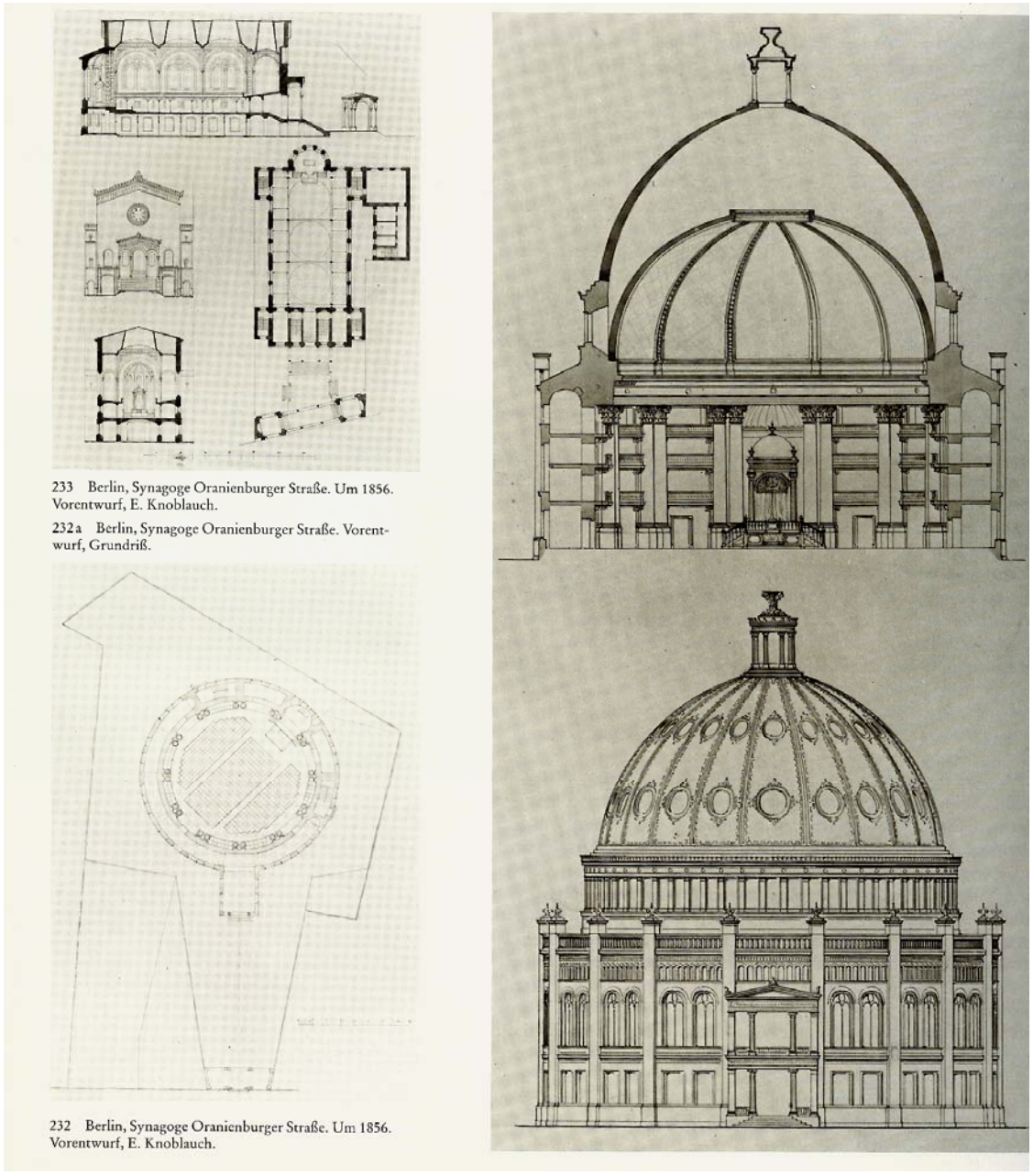


Fig. 50: Reform Synagogue (1854), Johannisstraße  
Source: Hans-Peter Schwarz (ed.), *Die Architektur der Synagoge* (Frankfurt: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 207





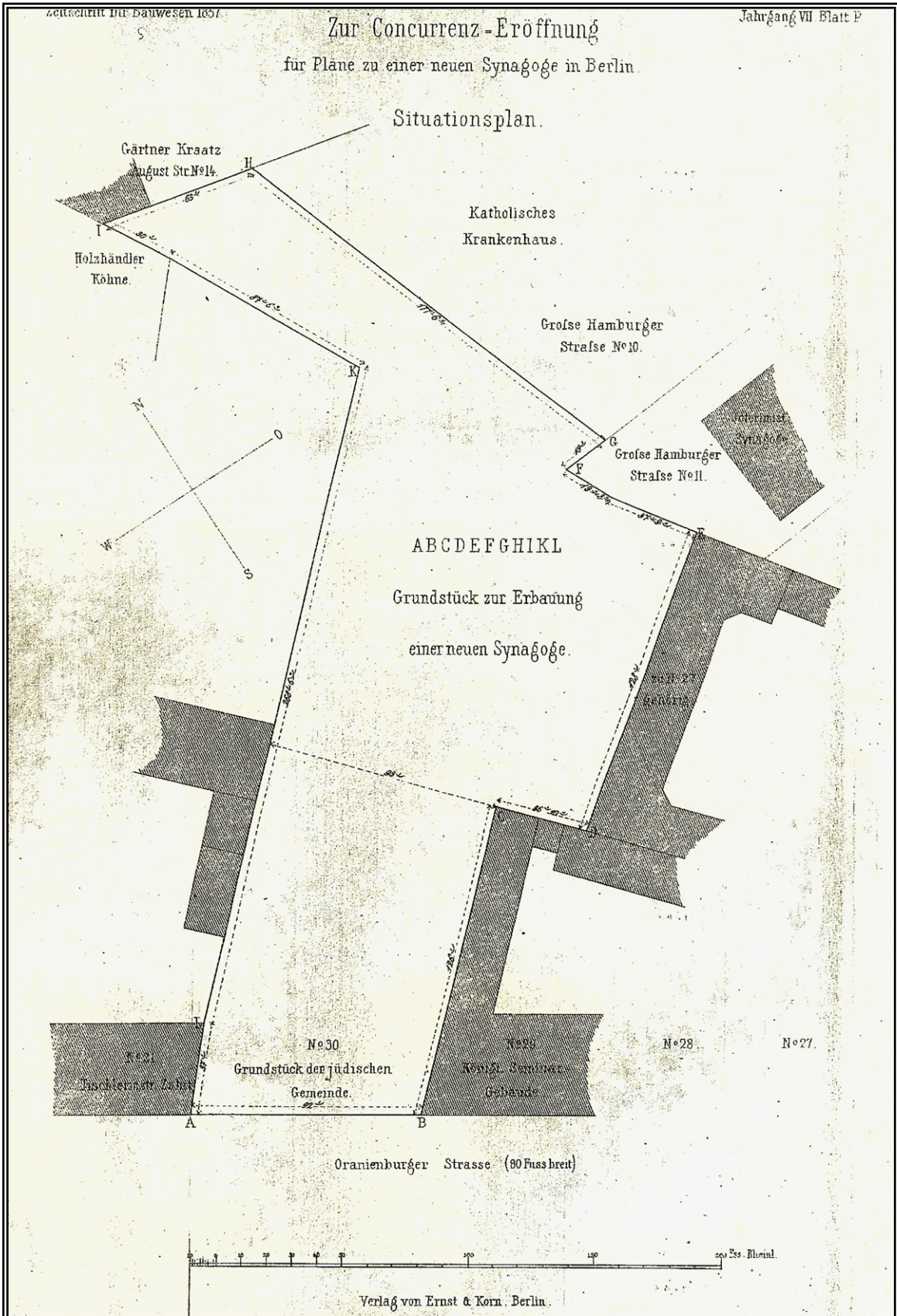
233 Berlin, Synagoge Oranienburger Straße. Um 1856. Vorentwurf, E. Knoblauch.

232a Berlin, Synagoge Oranienburger Straße. Vorentwurf, Grundriß.

232 Berlin, Synagoge Oranienburger Straße. Um 1856. Vorentwurf, E. Knoblauch.

Fig. 51: Early drawings by Eduard Knoblauch, ca. 1856  
 Source: Hans-Peter Schwarz (ed.), *Die Architektur der Synagoge* (Frankfurt: Klett- Cotta, 1988), 208

Fig. 52: Announcement of the design competition in the *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 7 (1857): 448-450





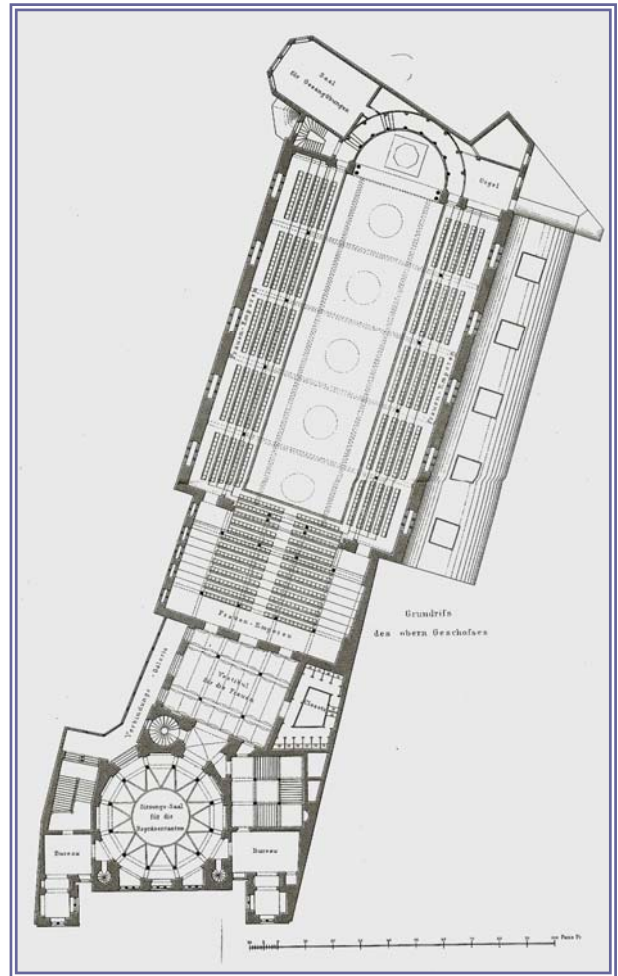
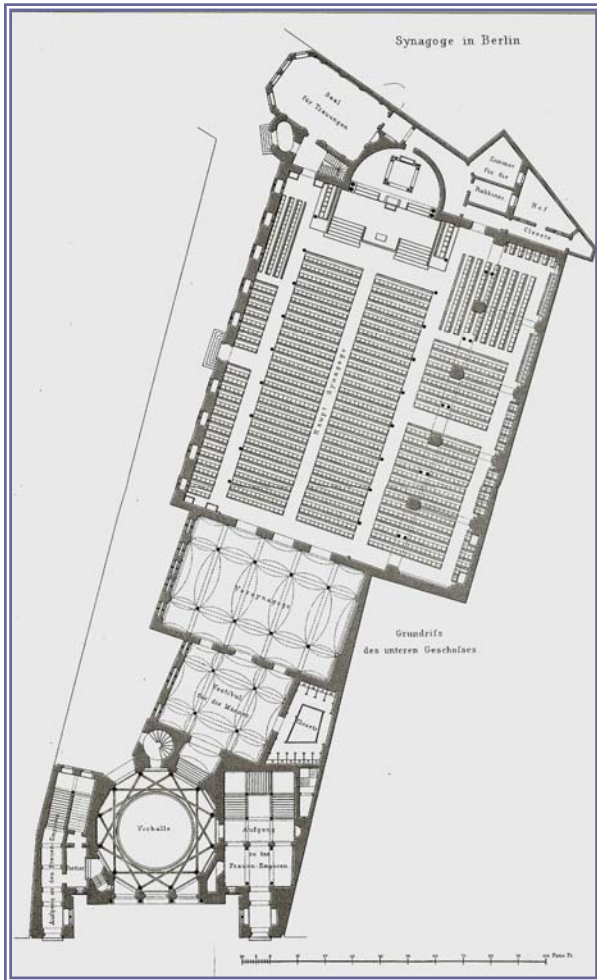


Fig. 53: Floor-plan Oranienburgerstraße Synagogue  
 Source: G. Knoblauch and F. Hollin, *Die Neue Synagoge in Berlin 1867* (reprinted in Berlin, Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum, 1992)



Fig. 54: Synagogue Adass Jisroel, Artilleriestraße, Berlin Mitte (photo: Landesarchiv Berlin, no. 413216)



Fig. 55: Synagoge Albrechtstraße 117, Berlin Steglitz, ca. 1885 (photo: Landesarchiv Berlin, no. 279038)



Fig. 56: Synagogue Rosenstraße 23, Berlin Mitte, 1894 (photo: Landesarchiv Berlin, no. 61/3876)



Fig. 57: Jüdenstraße and, in the background, the Stralauer Straße, Berlin Mitte, ca. 1900 (photo: Landesarchiv Berlin, no. 155-359)

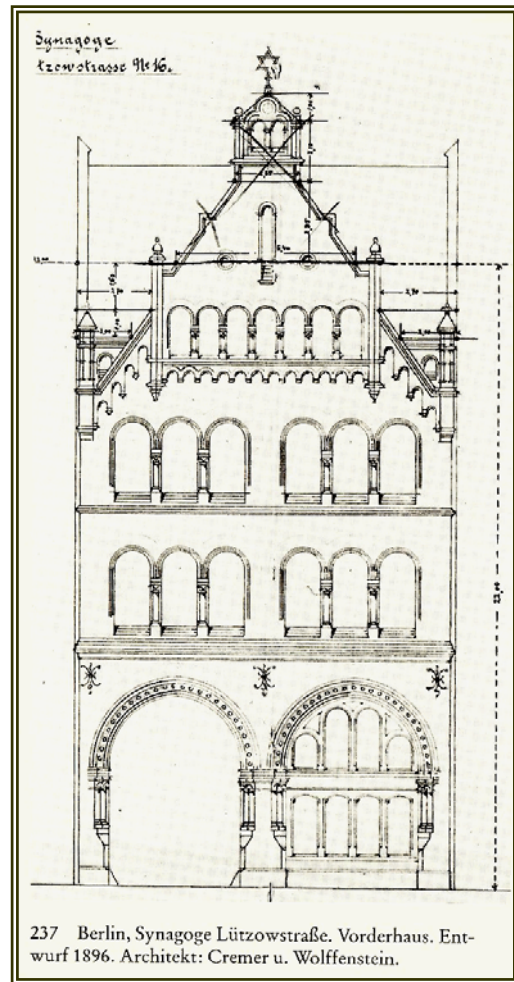
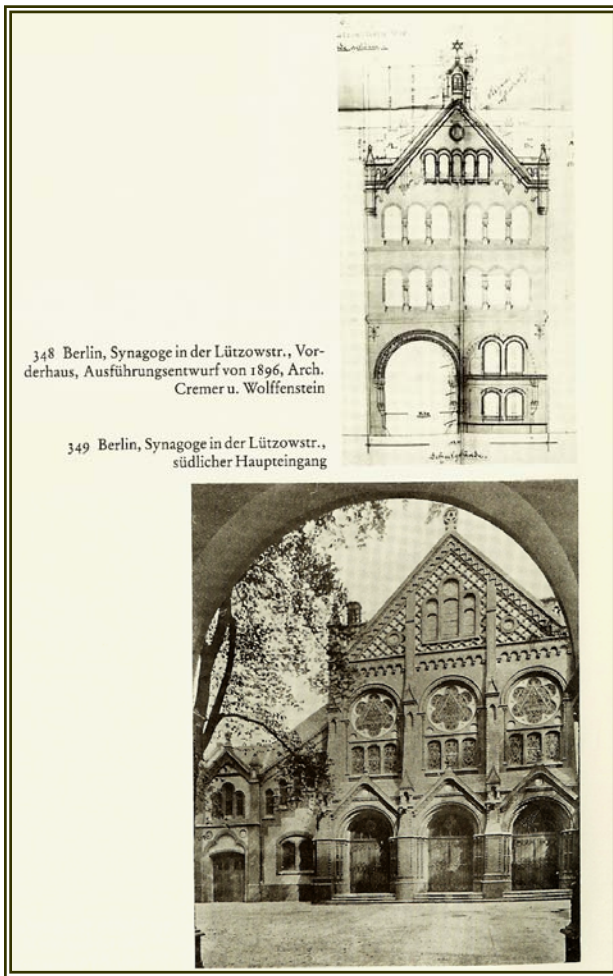


Fig. 58: Synagogue in the Lützowstraße, 1896  
 Source: Harold Hammer-Schenk, *Synagogen in Deutschland: Geschichte einer Baugattung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (1780-1933)*, Teil 2 (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1981)

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

Synagogues are great story-tellers. While their brick and mortar exteriors appear silent and cold, if one is willing to listen they tell lively tales about themselves, their audience, and their surroundings. The size, architectural style, location, and interior design of purpose-built synagogues reflect, among others, the economic status, aesthetic preferences, and socio-political ambitions of the local congregation. Likewise, the activities taking place inside synagogues disclose the variety of purposes for which these buildings were used, be it religious observance, marriage ceremonies for the well-to-do, or the propagation of political and ideological views. And lastly, the presence or absence of new interior features – such as an organ, the union of the bimah and the ark, seating arrangements, or a large vestibule – reveal how Jews approached questions of acculturation, religious traditions, reform, and self-representation. As houses of worship assumed a greater public role in the second half of the nineteenth century, they became aesthetic barometers for European Jewry's degree of and response to modernization. That synagogues tell very different stories depending on national and local context, however, suggests that the Jewish communities in Amsterdam, London, and Berlin experienced this era quite differently.

For instance, while the majority of Jews had adjusted extensively to the societies in which they lived, there seemed to have been different expectations with regard to the ultimate purpose of acculturation. In Holland and England, in part due to their mercantilist past, religious pluralism and particularism were accepted qualities of the

modern state; Judaism had for long been one of a variety of denominations. In Holland, in particular, the development of a pillarized society in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in which the Roman Catholics, Social-Democrats, and Liberals established their own political parties, schools, newspapers, and cultural organizations, normalized the extent of religious and cultural distinctiveness. This tolerance, however reluctant it may have been among some Christian contemporaries, caused the Jews' acculturation in the religious domain to remain largely limited to cosmetic reform. There was no need to prove the regeneration of Judaism. The structural arrangement of synagogues in Amsterdam – as well as in London – thus remained Orthodox. While we do witness the integration of contemporary design features into the interior floor plan – a vestibule where couples could meet after the service became common in London, as did the centralization of the pulpit and the incorporation of a choir gallery – there was no attempt to camouflage the commitment to Orthodox Judaism or to reduce a Jewish identity to merely a denominational category.

The situation was different in Berlin. In Prussia the Jews were pressured to revolutionize themselves, not only in the occupational, educational, and cultural domain, but also in the religious realm. Only if the Jews “regenerated” themselves to the point where they deserved to be called German would they earn legal equality, although the parameters of these reforms and the vision of what a transformed Jewish life would look like were never entirely clear. There was, however, an expectation on the part of many German gentiles that the Jews would ultimately give up their Judaism altogether and become German in the fullest sense, although a history of stigmatization and the growing popularity of racial theories in the last decades of the nineteenth century rendered the

likelihood of this *Verschmelzung* [complete integration] increasingly untenable. In a region where nation-building and identity-building was intensely correlated with *Deutschtum*, Judaism remained an “anomaly,” an un-German religious tradition. During the time of the construction of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue, most Jews were not willing to convert to Christianity and progressed instead with the modernization of their faith. The Berlin synagogue, a revolutionary building at the time, was a reflection of this attempt. Built at the height of the emancipation debate, it sought to express in visual form the “worthiness” of the Berlin Jewish community. The political dimension of acculturation in Prussia translated in cosmetic and halakhic reforms in synagogue design and in religious services. Berlin Jews were thus much more receptive to change than their co-religionists in London and Amsterdam, in part because they regarded acculturation and reform in the religious domain a requirement in order to obtain what their neighbors in the west had already enjoyed for decades. It is therefore not unusual to see pleas for reform in the *AZdJ* surrounded by messages on the political and legal status of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

That the Berlin synagogue assumed a bold and ostentatious exterior should come as no surprise. In the context of northern Europe, those Jews who were acculturated and financially comfortable but still subject to legal restrictions made the loudest public statement. While Dutch and Anglo Jewry remained relatively inconspicuous in their public presence – due not merely to a less turbulent political climate, but also to cultural conformity, pragmatism, and financial limitations – Prussian Jews had a *Judenfrage* that demanded a strong response. Residential concentration and congregational growth

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<sup>1</sup> In April, 1862, for instance, the *AZdJ* featured an article on the *Orgelfrage*, notifying its readers of the petitions circulating in the neighborhood so as to change the executive committee’s mind. On the same page it informed readers of the new headquarters of the *Preussische Volksverein* in the Wilhelmstrasse, whose 16,000 members “campaign against the Jews obtaining full civil rights.” The question over reform and legal equality were not separate issues. See the *AZdJ* 26: 17 (April 22, 1862).



certainly contributed to the need to erect a monumental building, but the wish for visibility caused it to become a monumental Moorish one.

This is not to say that all Moorish synagogues in central Europe emerged out of a cry for political recognition. We have already established that making generalizations about architectural styles and meaning can lead to misconceptions and that contextualization is vital to refine our understanding of what synagogues meant for Jews in the nineteenth century. The Berlin case, within the particular context of the Jewish emancipation debate, German unification efforts, and national identity-formation, provided an individual story. It is true, however, that Moorish architecture frequently had a political connotation. Many Moorish synagogues were designed by gentile architects, some of whom publicly stated that they had chosen the oriental style because it was commensurate with the Jews' difference – not merely in terms of their religious observance, but also as people. Knoblauch himself proclaimed that he was designing a synagogue for the “großen, national abgeschlossenen Gemeinschaft,” that large, nationally isolated community, the Jews.<sup>2</sup> This is where the communicative gap lay; whereas for Berlin Jewry the new synagogue announced the *religious* distinctiveness of an otherwise German-centered and loyal minority, to the wider public the building confirmed the Jews' difference from the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Uncomfortable with the prospect of such a miscommunication, German-Jewish architects, including Albert Rosengarten and Edwin Oppler, purposefully avoided the oriental style and adhered instead to a vernacular architecture.

In London the Moorish style was moderately popular, but it certainly was not the dominant expression for synagogues. The Jewish community, under the leadership of the

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<sup>2</sup> See L.P., “Carl Heinrich Eduard Knoblauch,” *Zeitschrift für Praktische Baukunst* (1865), 301.

United Synagogue, preferred a reserved eclectic style that blended into the urban environment. The emphasis in Victorian culture on respectability and aesthetic composure, together with the established community's desire to maintain a low profile, prevented the emergence of monumental Moorish synagogues. Neo-Islamic elements were applied, but in modesty and reserved more frequently for the building's interior than its exterior. With regard to public self-expression, then, the Anglo-Jewish community was much more conformist than the German-Jewish one, although their (private) religious practices remained predominantly traditional. The fact that new synagogues and the growing public presence of Jews generated relatively little interest on the part of gentiles suggests that the acculturation and integration of London Jews was further advanced than on the continent. This is also reflected in their residential patterns; middle-class Jews moved away from the Jewish neighborhood and dispersed to western and north-western districts earlier and in greater numbers than did their contemporaries in Amsterdam and Berlin.

In Amsterdam, too, oriental architecture enjoyed but little success. Indeed, the building of new communal synagogues there remained conspicuously absent. The community's financial limitations, the presence of two large, seventeenth-century synagogues, the priority of providing relief for a large contingent of poor residents, and the fact that there was no need for an architecture of emancipation all prevented the initiation of a large-scale building plan in the Dutch capital. When a Jewish congregation did build – the Gerard Dou synagogue comes to mind – it adopted the popular Dutch Renaissance style, not necessarily because of its ideological connotations, but because of

its affordability (brick), its speedy construction process, and its suitability to the overall street design.

What our comparative analysis suggests, then, is that architecture served different purposes and objectives depending on geography. While in all three cities architectural theorists prescribed certain qualities to architectural styles, linking aesthetic traditions to “character,” it depended on the host culture in question to determine how Jews appropriated these ideological subtexts. For Jews in London, for instance, it did not really matter whether the synagogue’s external features were Italian, Byzantine, Romanesque or Moorish; what mattered was the way in which any style or mixture of styles was handled. Character, and by extension aesthetic respectability, was determined by degree and intensity of execution. The London landscape was aesthetically diverse; blending into the cityscape – and blending into Victorian society – therefore did not demand one particular architectural expression. The same was true for Amsterdam, although there pragmatism, in addition to the association with the Golden Age, rendered the Dutch Renaissance particularly appealing. In neither one of these places was there a desire for a Jewish architecture, an “authentic” Jewish expression, because neither Anglo-Jewry nor Dutch-Jewry were looking for one. Moreover, in the Dutch case, where hevre synagogues emerged predominantly in the densely populated Jewish neighborhood, a distinctive architecture and a public display of “Jewishness” were considered superfluous; the very location already associated the buildings with the Jewish population.

In Berlin, as we have seen, synagogue architecture played a more pronounced role in announcing the public face of Judaism. The publication of a design competition in the *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen*, the decision to revise Knoblauch’s initial drawings so as to

make the golden dome more visible, the building's sheer size and prominent location, and the outspoken oriental exterior were a conscious attempt on the part of the building committee to stake a claim to the permanent and conspicuous presence of the Jews in the city. The structure invited a gentile gaze, it demanded a positive conversation on the Jews of Berlin – one that would finally bring the *Judenfrage* to an end and realize full equality. Their legal status, after all, was still a contested matter, as was their claim to membership of the German *Volksgemeinschaft*. In 1865, a year before the inauguration of the Oranienburgerstraße synagogue, an editorial in the *AZdJ* stated that many contemporaries in Prussia “still found it impossible to think of the Jews as Germans”:

why shouldn't we tell the truth? Among the cultured peoples [*Kulturvölker*], it is the Germans who continue to oppose our equality and it is in the German states that our emancipation is still unrealized . . . Indeed, that so much is written and said about it here proves that in Germany we have to overcome the extraordinary in order for equality to be acknowledged . . . In north-America, France, Holland, Belgium, England, Denmark, and Italy only little has appeared in writing on this topic, but [legal emancipation] was implement in only a short period of time.<sup>3</sup>

In order to overcome the extraordinary, the Jews of Berlin took an extraordinary approach by building the largest and most striking synagogue in the world. Seeking to explain Judaism to a non-Jewish audience, it presented Judaism as a civilized and respectable faith – one that stood in stark contrast to enduring stereotypes, such as that of the “artless Jew” and his “uncultured” behavior.<sup>4</sup> The organ, the fixed pews facing the altar, the sophisticated lighting system, the strictly enforced rules of decorum, and the overall spirit of *Bildung*, all elements that gentile observers could recognize and appreciate, demonstrated the Jews' cultivated behavior and fine taste. Most of all, it showcased the Jews' successful “regeneration” and “worthiness” as German citizens of the Jewish faith.

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<sup>3</sup> “Judenthum und Deutschthum,” *AZdJ* 29: 17 (April 25, 1865): 251-256.

<sup>4</sup> Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, 2000).

The contextualization of north-European synagogues provides insight not merely into how urban Jews saw themselves and how they wanted to be seen by their contemporaries; it also gives clues on how Anglo, Dutch, and German Jews viewed each other. Living only a few hundred miles apart but under quite different political and socio-economic circumstances, the communities of London, Amsterdam, and Berlin looked upon each other as if they were worlds apart. Interestingly, each one regarded his own city as the best place to live in Europe, despite frustrations over economic difficulties or legal restrictions. The established Anglo-Jewish community, before the wave of immigration in the 1880s and 1890s, considered Victorian England an enlightened and tolerant place that, except for some unfortunate but “innocent” incidents, had largely accepted the Jews as a religious minority. They viewed Prussia as a place where Jews continued to suffer inequalities, if no longer in the legislative sphere after 1869, then at least in the socio-economic sphere. Emancipation, they maintained, was only moderately successful in Prussia, as opposed to England. Moreover, they viewed Dutch Jews as being stuck in the Middle Ages, as traditionalists who refrained from moving along with the times. Victorian Jews considers themselves lucky to live and thrive in London, the center of the British Empire, the heart of modern civilization.

Amsterdam Jews, however much they grumbled about old-timers holding leadership positions, felt equally fortunate about their situation. They considered Holland, out of all the European countries, the most welcoming and politically stable place in Europe, as it had been since the late sixteenth century. Many Dutch Jews believed their brethren in Berlin had taken their quest for legal emancipation and modernization too far and had ceased being Jews. They viewed Reform Judaism, which dominated Dutch-

Jewish discourse on the topic of Prussia, as dangerous. While they admired German Jewry's dedication to decorum, they also found its intensity suspicious and deriving from the wrong motivation. Berlin Jews, in their view, were trying so hard to become German that they had forgotten how to be Jews. Indeed, the example of the Berlin community was one of the motivations for why reform initiatives in Amsterdam were introduced at such a slow pace, and why synagogue space remained predominantly Orthodox. With regard to their co-religionists in London, Dutch Jews acknowledged their positions were similar. Both Amsterdam and London had been good to the Jews and had allowed them to develop a communal structure, including schools, hospitals, and synagogues, homes for the elderly and social clubs. Many Dutch Jews moved to London in the first half of the nineteenth century when the economic situation in Amsterdam continued to lag and prospects were better across the English Channel.

With respect to Berlin, many Jews there, too, considered the Prussian capital a more desirable place to live than anywhere else in Europe. Berlin, after all, was “*der Metropole der Intelligenz*.”<sup>5</sup> They were fully committed to German culture and to the emerging nation-state, and shared the belief with their fellow gentile citizens that *Deutsche Kultur* far outshone that of their neighbors. While they were fully aware of the difficulties and challenges they still faced, they also believed these could ultimately be overcome by taking a pro-active stance. Their commitment to *Bildung* and their loyalty to the unwritten but understood emancipation contract would eventually erase the last remnants of anti-Jewish sentiments. Berlin Jewry, however, would have to play an energetic role in achieving these goals and was not to wait patiently for these changes to

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<sup>5</sup> Landesarchiv Berlin - Soz. 522: *Die Israelitische Synagogengemeinde (Adass Jisroel) zu Berlin: Ein Rückblick* (Berlin: Verlag von Rathausen & Lamm, 1904), 15.

occur by themselves. The Oranienburgerstraße synagogue exemplified this attempt: the discussions surrounding its emergence suggest that local Jews considered this building an expression of their dual identity as well as a political necessity. While they realized their co-religionists elsewhere in northern Europe did not have to make such explicit appeals, they preferred Berlin over places where the Jews were “culturally impoverished” and introspective. The Jews in Amsterdam, sneered the *AZdJ*, “remain persistently separated and closed off from general society, as if surrounded by the Great Wall of China . . . the dynamic Jewish spirit is in stagnation there . . . Judaism is hermetically sealed off from the virtues of *Bildung*, as if they want to mummify it.”<sup>6</sup> Gathering from views such as these, it might be argued that to German Jews, legal emancipation in and of itself was not the only ingredient to progress. Dutch Jews had been emancipated since 1796 but, in the eyes of their neighbors, it had not brought them the integration into gentile society that so obsessed the German-Jewish middle class. The latter did not envy the Jews of Holland, who they considered intellectually lazy, religiously conservative, and socially isolated.

However much these urban communities emphasized their mutual differences, we can also discern patterns of similarity. The Jews in all three capitals experienced upward social and economic mobility, although in Holland the move into the middle and upper middle class occurred much later than elsewhere. Heinrich Heine would most likely nod his head in agreement here; he once stated that “when the end of the world comes, [he preferred] to be in Holland because everything happens fifty years later there.” While in the mid-nineteenth century a full third of London Jewry and more than half of Berlin Jewry belonged to the middle class, it would take until the early twentieth century until

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<sup>6</sup> “Skizzen aus Holland,” *AZdJ* 31: 9 (February 26, 1867): 168-171; “Skizzen aus Holland III: Der religiöse Standpunkt, wie er sich in der Praxis des Lebens offenbart,” *AZdJ* 31:21 (May 21, 1867): 411-415.

the same could be said of Amsterdam. Our communities also stood out in occupational concentration – the majority was engaged in the manufacturing and trade of, among others, textiles, cigars, and precious stones. Growing numbers moved into the free professions and began to make careers as physicians, lawyers, and architects, although again Dutch Jewry was proportionally “behind.” The latter experienced economic mobility, but they moved from the working-class into the lower-middle class only in the last decades of the nineteenth century, rendering the Dutch-Jewish bourgeoisie comparatively small. And with respect to population growth and residential clustering, too, our communities showed parallels. While middle-class Londoners began leaving the Jewish neighborhood in the 1850s and 1860s, they again created new enclaves in western districts and founded new communal facilities there, including new synagogues. The Jews in London, Amsterdam, and Berlin thus remained demographically concentrated in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The new building initiatives under scrutiny here reflect both the peculiarities and similarities of development. A monumental synagogue in Berlin Mitte, for instance, was a logical step considering the residential patterns and the socio-political ambitions of the local population; most Jews still lived in the Jewish neighborhood and felt that building a conspicuous Moorish structure was a communal and political necessity. The emergence of multiple, modest district synagogues in London, on the other hand, suggests that the concerns of Anglo Jews centered not so much on politics and public visibility, but rather on the needs of keeping a suburbanizing population observant and on the creation of a centralized communal structure. Likewise, the absence of new synagogues in Amsterdam and the proliferation of hevrot was directly related to the community’s economic make-



up, the high demand for poor relief, escalating land prices, and the complete absence of legal and political challenges.

A comparative analysis of synagogue building, then, allows us to draw a number of conclusions. First, it illuminates the importance of place in the study of Jewish life in nineteenth-century Europe. It confirms that we cannot reduce the development of European Jewry to one particular model and make generalizations based on this model about different urban communities, but that we need to be sensitive to prevailing local circumstances and conditions.<sup>7</sup> The development of Amsterdam Jewry, for instance, very clearly did not follow the German model, confirming once again that the Germanocentric view of modern Jewish history is deficient. The majority of the Ashkenazim in Amsterdam adopted Dutch patterns of behavior long before they experienced upward social and economic mobility and without the emergence of an intellectual elite. Emancipation also did not fail in Holland. On the contrary, had the Nazis not invaded in 1940 and destroyed Jewish life in Amsterdam, the Jews would most likely have furthered their integration into Dutch society, similar to patterns in England. The virtual absence of a Jewish Question, the politically liberal climate, the overall sense of security, and

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob Katz (1904-1998) was one of the main proponents of this Germanocentric view of modern Jewish history. According to his *Out of the Ghetto* (1973), the first transformations pointing to a break in tradition and to the emergence of a modern Jewish society could be traced to Berlin, where the *haskalah* (enlightenment) and Jewish intellectual elites produced new views about Judaism and the western world, revealing a change in self-consciousness. This then “trickled down” to the community at large, a linear process, argues Katz, which could later be seen across Europe. Katz’ uniform model, which placed Germany at the center of Jewish modernization and which favored the intellectual shifts of elites over the behavioral changes of the majority, has been criticized for its conceptional narrowness. Scholars of modern Jewish history have shown that not only were there multiple paths to modernization, but that the very model itself misrepresents the experience of German Jewry. See, among others, Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), ix-xxiii; Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (eds.), *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Frances Malino and David Sorkin (eds.), *Profiles in Diversity: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998) David Sorkin, “Enlightenment and Emancipation: German Jewry’s Formative Age in Comparative Perspective,” in Todd M. Endelman (ed.), *Comparing Jewish Societies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 89-112.

improving socio-economic conditions had done just that in the decades before World War II.

Similarly, the German model cannot account for the developments occurring in London, where Jewish residents began moving toward western districts long before their co-religionists on the continent and where no urban elite of publicists, reformers, and educators emerged to “instruct” the public on a new vision of Judaism.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, when we look at local conditions and patterns of behavior, we find that Victorian Jews were far ahead of their central European brethren. They were living the lives that Berlin Jews were still fighting for; they were legally emancipated, bourgeois, and were not singled out as a “problem” by the gentile population. Berlin Jewry, for long believed to have been the pioneers of the modern Jewish experience, thus did not constitute the paradigm that explains European Jewry’s path to modernity. Granting the peculiarities of place greater authority in our analysis, then, reshapes in general how we look at the modern European Jewish experience.

A second conclusion that we can draw from our comparative study is that communal synagogues, where they did emerge, adopted new functions and new meanings. Both in London and Berlin, the synagogue became much more central to the public display of Jewishness. The *Milieufrömmigkeit* of the early modern period, in which an unquestioned identity was shaped by a tight-knit communal environment in which the synagogue building itself played a relatively minor role, had disintegrated. Now that urban Jews were highly acculturated to a predominantly Christian society and less immersed in a community defined by Jewish laws, rituals, and traditions, the synagogue became the public manifestation of their modern identity – one that fused the

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<sup>8</sup> Endelman, viii.

fundamentals of Jewish religion with the prevailing cultural codes of modern society. Consequently, the building obtained a much greater importance in Jewish life than it had before.

The irony here is that the less Jews went to synagogue due to the growing force of secularization, the more important these buildings became. They announced their presence not merely in the built environment, but also in the literary and artistic domain. Contemporaries saw their design plans in popular newspapers and building journals. Inaugurations became highly publicized events. During the latter, communal officials often carried the Torah scrolls through the streets to the synagogue, marking the immediate vicinity, in the words of Richard Cohen, “as a public space shared by Jews and non-Jews alike.”<sup>9</sup> Publicizing and celebrating new houses of worship also occurred through the reproduction of photographs, postcards, and commemorative medals, all of which magnified the visibility of the synagogue in the private as well as in the public sphere.

The growing centrality of the building was enhanced by an expansion of its function. Purpose-built synagogues in the second half of the nineteenth century became spaces where the spiritual and the secular met. While houses of worship before this time were certainly not immune to “outside” influences – we know that business and politics regularly found their way into the religious domain of the synagogue – this was not granted any importance visually or aesthetically. They were the realities of everyday life that “interfered” with the primary function of the building, namely religious observance and study. From the 1850s onwards, however, the synagogue incorporated into its design

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<sup>9</sup> Richard I. Cohen, “Urban Visibility and Biblical Visions: Jewish Culture in Western and Central Europe in the Modern Age,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, edited by David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 725-796.

structural elements that gave prominence to contemporary socio-cultural practices. Vestibules, where spouses and acquaintances could mingle, became a common feature, as did lecterns and platforms from which rabbis could deliver morally edifying or politically charged sermons. Screens, too, disappeared, advancing the position of women in the synagogue from an invisible minority to a noticeable constituent of the congregation, redefining religious gender roles. Indeed, new synagogues reserved a proportionately higher number of seats for women than in the past. Their accompaniment as devout wives and their attendance at services, as well as their visibility in the synagogue itself, served as a means to display the bourgeois respectability of both husband and wife. One contemporary observed that her very exposure, which discouraged irreverent gossip and inattentiveness, would promote proper behavior and improve her spiritual experience.

One might even argue, then, as Simone Lässig has recently done, that the modern synagogue became a space of moral and social discipline. The exposure of women, the edifying sermons, the introduction of wedding and confirmation ceremonies, and the aestheticization of religious services all served to aid the collective appropriation of bourgeois cultural mores. According to Lässig, Jewish house of worship became “a medium through which middle-class mentalities and values could be transmitted and then transformed into practical reference points for life outside the synagogue.”<sup>10</sup> From this perspective the building itself became one space in which Jews redefined their identity as

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<sup>10</sup> Simone Lässig, “The Emergence of a Middle-Class Religiosity: Social and Cultural Aspects of the German-Jewish Reform Movement During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in Rainer Liedtke and David Rechter (eds.), *Towards Normality? Acculturation and Modern German Jewry* (London: Leo Baeck Institute, 2003), 140. Jakob Vogel made a similar point in a discussion on German Jewry’s entry into the public sphere. Jewish symbols and rituals, including those related to synagogues, argued Vogel, “should be understood as the actual vehicles through which [contemporary] social interests were articulated and shaped,” making them active participants in new forms of Jewish self-expression. See “Comment by Jakob Vogel,” in Michael Brenner, Vicki Caron, and Uri R. Kaufmann (eds.), *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered: The French and German Models* (London: Leo Baeck Institute, 2003), 73.

fully acculturated members of society. We can, however, refine Lässig's point and argue that it is precisely in the synagogue that the boundaries and limits of acculturation were debated and contested, rendering it a central space for Jews to mediate their Jewishness. The nature and outcome of these debates differed depending on national and local context.

The field of aesthetic and symbolic politics, we can conclude, illuminates very well the nuances of urban Jewish life in northern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. In particular, it highlights how important Jewish self-representation had become at a time when Jews themselves became much less "Jewish." This was particularly true for places where illiberal forces remained strong and where the creation of a positive image was considered imperative to social and political progress. European Jews, with the possible exception of the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities in Golden Age Amsterdam, had never been very concerned with public expressions of Jewishness. However, as conditions in the nineteenth century altered, not merely with respect to the economic well-being of urban Jews but also with respect to changes in European society at large, synagogues became public manifestations of the diversity in the modern Jewish experience.

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