

Jewish Historical Studies

Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England

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How to cite: Colthof, J. 'From juvenile criminal to Jewish scholar: the nineteenth-century Protestant mission among Amsterdam Jews which culminated in a murder attempt on a clergyman.' *Jewish Historical Studies*, 2017, 48(1), pp. 138-157. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2016v48.029>.

Published: 01 May 2017

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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Open Access:

Jewish Historical Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

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From juvenile criminal to Jewish scholar: the nineteenth-century Protestant mission among Amsterdam Jews which culminated in a murder attempt on a clergyman

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This article concerns the assassination attempt by Samuel Abraham Hirsch on a minister, Carl Schwartz, a converted Jew, on 1 August 1858. Hirsch, a member of the Orthodox Jewish establishment in Amsterdam, was fifteen years old. The incident, which took place in the Scottish Mission Church in Amsterdam, was motivated by growing resentment among Amsterdam Jews against the missionary endeavours of the Free Church of Scotland and sympathizing members of the Dutch Reformed orthodoxy. A remarkable fact is that the attempted assassination of a clergyman by a Jew during a church service had no repercussions, whereas a similar event in Eastern Europe might have incited a violent response. This episode can best be appreciated against the historical background of the position of the Jewish community in the Netherlands from the seventeenth century onwards. The present study, furthermore, sheds light on the role of the House of Orange regarding the request for royal recognition of an initiative to convert Jews.

Schwartz was injured in the incident, but resumed work after two months. Hirsch was sentenced to twelve years in a correctional institution, and was pardoned after four. Eventually, he moved to London, where he grew into an erudite scholar. He published numerous scientific papers and served for years as the secretary of the London branch of Hovevei Zion (“those who love Zion”).

The family background of Samuel Abraham Hirsch

Samuel Abraham Hirsch was born in Amsterdam on 1 March 1843, the thirteenth child of a strictly Orthodox Jewish family. His ancestors originated from Frankfurt an der Oder and made a living from printing Hebrew books. They moved their trade in the eighteenth century to

Amsterdam, which was renowned for its high-quality printing of Hebrew texts. The Hirsch family was known for its erudition. Samuel's father, who died five months before his birth, was a prominent Jewish scholar. Joseph Tsvi, Samuel's eldest brother and twenty-two years his senior, served as Acting Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam until his death in 1870. Samuel's mother, Aaltje Hes, survived her husband by forty-seven years and exerted a dominant influence on the family.¹ She had to raise her youngest children as a single mother with the assistance of her eldest son Joseph Tsvi.²

Another family member worthy of note is Aaltje's father, Aberle Hes, who in 1836 took the unique step of settling in the then inhospitable Palestine. Samuel never met his grandfather, but must have heard about him from his mother. This fact may have influenced his later involvement in Zionist activities, as secretary of Hovevei Zion in London. Hovevei Zion, the forerunner of the Zionist movement, was founded in reaction to the pogroms against Jews in Eastern Europe. Its aim was to improve the quality of life of the Jews and to strengthen Jewish settlements in Palestine. Samuel Hirsch was also the editor-in-chief of *Palestine, the Chovevei Zion Quarterly*.³ Nahum Sokolow, president of the World Zionist Organization, described him as "an ardent Hovev Zion all his life".⁴

The assassination attempt

Little is known about Samuel's childhood years. There are no indications of his having had emotional or behavioural disorders. He grew up in the spirit of Orthodox Judaism and obviously identified with role models supplied by his family and school teachers. The dramatic crime committed by the fifteen-year-old in the Scottish Mission Church in Amsterdam is therefore all the more surprising.

According to the Amsterdam District Court minutes of 21 December 1858, Samuel Abraham Hirsch had entered the Scottish church on Sunday

1 See the memoirs of Samuel's descendant, Nehamah Mayer-Hirsch, *Wie zijn de Voorouders van jouw Vader?* (Amersfoort: privately printed, 2009), addressed to her grandson, Elisja Mayer.

2 Mozes H. Gans, *Memorbook: Pictorial History of Dutch Jewry from the Renaissance to 1940*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1977), 367.

3 Isidore Harris, *Jews' College Jubilee Volume, Comprising a History of the College* (London: Luzac, 1906).

4 Nahum Sokolow, *Hibbath Zion (The Love for Zion): Stating the Principles and Activities of the Pre-Herzl Palestinophile (Hovevey Zion = Lovers of Zion) Movement in Religion, Literature and Life about 1840–1897* (Jerusalem: Ludwig Mayer, 1934), 239.

morning, 1 August of that year, with a dagger hidden under his garments. When Carl Schwartz ascended the preacher's pulpit and started praying, Samuel stormed up the pulpit steps and tried in vain to unlock the gate. He then stabbed Schwartz three times, once in the breast and twice in the left arm. One of the witnesses, who held onto Samuel until a policeman apprehended him, cited Samuel as saying: "I am an Israelite" and "This proselytizer must go."

The court minutes further mention that Samuel had purchased the dagger a few days before the drama, and had written down a Hebrew text, which he recited aloud several times to embolden himself.⁵ Samuel stated that he had involved no one in his plans, but had believed this to be a God-pleasing deed, though he realized now that he had erred. When asked about the motive for his crime, Samuel declared it was "to eradicate proselytizing". The prosecution demanded a sentence of ten to twenty years in a correctional institution on the basis of premeditation. The defence requested Samuel's acquittal on the grounds of "insanity" or "volitional incapacity". The judge concluded that Samuel had acted "in free will and judgment", and sentenced him to twelve years in a juvenile detention centre for attempted homicide with premeditation.⁶

Missionary activities among Jews in the nineteenth century

The nineteenth century is often referred to as the "century of mission".⁷ The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews was founded in 1809. Missionary activities among Jews gradually spread throughout other European countries. The Protestant Réveil, which represented Dutch orthodox Protestantism within the context of the State Church,⁸ was a religious revival that began in Switzerland and was propagated in the Netherlands by the jurist and poet Willem Bilderdijk. This resurgence of Christian thought and conduct led to intensified study of the Bible, including the Old Testament, and generated a debate on the

5 I have found no traces of the text, but it may have been "I look for your deliverance, Lord" (Genesis 49:18) or one of the psalms.

6 Amsterdam District Court verdict no. 872, Amsterdam, North Holland Archive, 198, inv. no. 52.

7 Jacob van Gelderen, "Protestantism and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Holland", in *Dutch Jewish History*, vol. II: *Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, ed. Jozeph Michman (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1989), 324.

8 Gert van Klinken, "Dutch Jews as Perceived by Dutch Protestants, 1860–1960", in *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, ed. Chaya Brasz and Yosef Kaplan (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 126.

duty of Protestant churches to convert Jews. The controversy regarding active mission among Jews persisted, but those in favour gained ground. Among these “activists” were converted Jews of Sephardic origin, such as the physician Abraham Capadose and the poet Isaac da Costa. Both joined the Christian faith in 1822 and became prominent figures in Bilderdijk’s Réveil. Whereas Capadose severed all ties with Judaism,⁹ da Costa strove to unify Christianity and Judaism. He believed that the chosen people had moved from the Jordan River to the Amstel, and that its God had become God of the Netherlands.¹⁰ He never ceased to consider himself a Jew.¹¹

Aggressive missionary activities among Amsterdam’s Jews caused much unrest in the Jewish neighbourhood. The main targets were poor members of the Jewish community, who were offered substantial amounts of money in exchange for conversion. The practice of enrolling converted Jews to approach those targeted members of the community aroused great anger among the Jews, yet remained largely unsuccessful.¹² It is against this background that Samuel planned his assassination attempt.

Carl Schwartz, the “proselytizer”

It is hardly surprising that Schwartz was chosen as the object of the attack, being a famous and, in Jewish eyes, infamous figure. Schwartz was widely known as a converted Jew and a Protestant preacher devoted to the mission among the Jews of Amsterdam. Who was this “proselytizer”, who according to Samuel “must go”? Carl Schwartz was born in Meseritz, Prussian Poland, in 1817 under the name Salomon Schwartz. He was destined to become a rabbi, but interrupted his studies to convert to Christianity. Schwartz was baptized in 1837 in the Nazareth-Kirche in Berlin and renamed Carl August Ferdinand. In 1842, he joined the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, which sent him to Constantinople to pursue missionary work among Jews there. In 1843, he became a member of the Free Church of Scotland, a denomination which had split from the Church of Scotland and was strongly oriented towards missionary activities. Schwartz was transferred to Berlin in 1844, returned to Scotland in 1848, and was assigned in 1849 to the Jewish community

9 Jozeph Michman, Hartog Beem, and Dan Michman, *Pinkas Hakehillot: Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities, the Netherlands* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1985), 32.

10 Jaap Meijer, *Isaac da Costa’s Weg naar het Christendom: Bijdrage tot de Geschiedenis der Joodsche Problematiek in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Joachimsthal, 1946).

11 Van Klinken, “Dutch Jews”, 126.

12 Michman et al., *Pinkas Hakehillot*, 32.

of Amsterdam, where he spent fifteen years.¹³ In 1851, after the death of his first wife, Schwartz remarried into the van Vollenhoven family, which belonged to the highest strata of the Protestant patriciate in Amsterdam.

The Free Church of Scotland regarded Amsterdam, which was home to a Jewish community of 26,000 people – more than eleven per cent of its total population – as a fertile ground for practising missionary work.¹⁴ Schwartz began his activity in the Jewish neighbourhood by preaching during the Sabbath, but was reportedly prevented from speaking, and had to endure repeated beatings. Shortly before his arrival in Amsterdam, the Jewish community started issuing its newspaper, *Israëlietisch Nieuws- en Advertentieblad*, as a counter-measure against the missionary activities. Schwartz tried to avert the fierce criticism voiced in this weekly newspaper against himself and the mission, but the editor consistently refused to publish his responses.

In 1850, Schwartz set up his own polemic publication, with the support of da Costa and Capadose.¹⁵ He named this periodical *De Heraut: een Stem over Israëel en tot Israëel* (The Herald: A Voice about Israel and to Israel).¹⁶ The *Heraut* bore as its motto a line from the Bible – in Hebrew! – clearly intended to influence the Jews: “the harbinger of good tidings, that announces salvation; that says unto Zion: your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7).¹⁷ Initially, *De Heraut* was bi-monthly and as of 1852 became a weekly newspaper;¹⁸ it was sent to all the rabbis in the Netherlands, and circulated as a pamphlet in the Jewish community.¹⁹ The following is a concise anthology of the main items covered in *De Heraut* under the editorship of Schwartz.

During *De Heraut*'s second year of publication, Schwartz attempted to attract the attention of the Jewish community by writing a weekly article on the portion from the Hebrew Bible that was read that same week in the synagogues.²⁰ In 1853, *De Heraut* sought to convey the message of common

13 Wulfert de Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden: Carl A. F. Schwartz* (Leiden: J. J. Groen en Zoon, 1990), 18–20.

14 Michman et al., *Pinkas Hakehillot*, 185.

15 De Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 40.

16 Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, “Arduous Adaptation 1814–1870”, in *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, ed. Johan C. H. Blom, Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, and Ivo Schöffer (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 218.

17 De Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 37.

18 Arend Kagchelland and Michiel Kagchelland, *Van Dompers en Verlichten* (Delft: Eburon, 2009), 698.

19 De Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 40.

20 *De Heraut* 3 (1852), collected by Schwartz in his *Twee en Vijftig Beschouwingen over de*

belief and common duties of the Jews and the Christians, in particular as regards the Old Testament. The paper called on Christians to pray for Jews. Schwartz suggested that Christians were insufficiently aware of the correlation between “the conversion of Israel, the thriving of the Church, and the wellbeing of the world”. He prompted Dutch Christians to follow the example of the many English Christians who prayed for Israel on Saturday mornings between seven and nine o’clock.²¹ In *De Heraut*’s fifth year of publication, Schwartz wrote about the Messiah’s manifestation and mission.²²

In 1855, Schwartz became more and more involved in ecclesiastical issues in Amsterdam. As a result, *De Heraut* developed into a factional newspaper representing the Reformed-Confessional doctrine (after Schwartz’s departure to England in 1864, *De Heraut* went into decline, in 1887 was renamed *Heraut van de Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland* [Herald of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands], but survived until closure in 1945).²³ In 1860, it published a detailed report about a church service held on 1 August, exactly two years after Hirsch’s assassination attempt. Schwartz categorically denied having anything to do with the circulation of pamphlets in the synagogues, which had deeply upset the Jews, and obviously Hirsch in particular. Schwartz further stated: “Young Samuel Hirsch did not know me in person, had never met me, and would have assaulted any person standing at the pulpit that morning. When Hirsch, who had thoroughly premeditated the assault, learned the true facts about the pamphlets, he said: ‘If so, I am sorry, for I have misjudged this man’.”²⁴

What effect did those writings have on Amsterdam’s Jewish community? It appears that *De Heraut* failed to produce any converts.²⁵ Schwartz did, however, succeed in exasperating the Jews, not least on account of his vow to grant 200 florins to any Jew willing to undergo baptism.²⁶ He furthermore initiated the distribution of the pamphlets to Jews on their way home from the synagogue on the Sabbath, a practice that caused great

boeken van Mozes [Fifty-two Reflections on the Books of Moses] (Utrecht, 1853).

21 Schwartz quoted by de Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 44.

22 *Ibid.*, 5 (1854), collected by Schwartz in his *De persoon en het werk van den Messias: Naar den Schrift geschetst* [The Person and the Writings of the Messiah: Described According to Holy Scripture], vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1855), vol. 2 [1863, not completed].

23 De Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 40. See Kagchelland and Kagchelland, *Van Dompers en Verlichten*, 698.

24 *De Heraut* 3 and 4 (1860), discussed in de Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 46–7.

25 Fuks-Mansfeld, “Arduous Adaptation”, 218.

26 Gans, *Memorbook*, 344.

annoyance among the Jews.²⁷ In the summer of 1858, English missionaries entered a synagogue in Amsterdam with packs of pamphlets, and were forcefully kicked out by the congregation.²⁸ This incident may well have been the direct motive for the assassination attempt of 1 August 1858.

As noted earlier, Schwartz recovered after a short while from his wounds, and resumed his clerical duties on 26 September. In 1864 he was called back to London, where he died in 1870.²⁹

The position of the Jewish community in the Netherlands

In order to understand the response – or, rather, the lack of response – to the assassination attempt on Carl Schwartz, let us first take a look at the position of the Jewish community in the Netherlands and especially in Amsterdam from the seventeenth century onwards. By the beginning of that century, the Netherlands had become a place where Jews could dwell in peace and tolerance earlier than in any other European country. Jews felt freer in the Dutch Republic, both religiously and economically, than elsewhere in Europe.³⁰ In Amsterdam, which was renowned for its religious tolerance, no Jew was denied the right to live and work, unless he was convicted of a crime.³¹ This tolerance was a reaction to the zealously Catholic regime of King Philip II of Spain, against which the Northern Provinces of the Low Countries rebelled in the 1560s. The Dutch Revolt put an end to a period of religious repression, in which Protestants were persecuted and killed as heretics. It also ended the rule of the Dutch Inquisition, which had originally been introduced by the Spanish regime. The Stadtholder (or provincial governor) Willem of Orange gave in 1572 as one of the reasons for taking up arms “that the Inquisition will be erased for ever”. In the century following the revolt, the Dutch Republic’s identity was defined in significant part by the rejection of religious persecution. To use the words of Amsterdam’s famous mayor, Cornelis Hooft (1547–1627):

27 See “Denk eens aan uw Joodjes in uw gebed”, *Het Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 21 Oct. 1999, p. 18.

28 Rebecca Kisch-Spitz, *Zichronoth* (Amsterdam: Keesing, 1952), 25.

29 De Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 22–4.

30 Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 11.

31 Bernard D. Cooperman, “Amsterdam from an International Perspective: Tolerance and Kehillah in the Portuguese Diaspora”, in *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–18; Daniel M. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000), 19.

“When we took up arms, it was to throw off the yoke of tyranny, not with the intention of dominating the conscience of others.”³²

The Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church replaced Catholicism as the official state religion in 1578.³³ A year later, the Union of Utrecht treaty was signed, and along with it the concept of “freedom of conscience” was born. This freedom allowed any person to adhere to his or her own creed in private, whereas the right to build public places of worship and to worship openly was reserved for the Dutch Reformed Church.³⁴ Yet, even though any person who wished to enter civic office had to belong to the “public church”, refusing to attend state church services entailed no penalties, as were imposed by the Act of Uniformity in England.³⁵ Willem of Orange had devised this concept of freedom in order to avoid political unrest based on religious dissension.³⁶

At first, the freedom of conscience had no effect on the Jews, but only on the Catholics and the various Protestant denominations, as Jews did not settle in Amsterdam until after 1590. The first official text referring to Jews concerns a decree issued in 1598 by the magistrates of Amsterdam, which allowed Portuguese merchants residing in the city to buy the rights of citizenship, on condition that they refrained from practising any religion other than the one professed in Amsterdam’s churches.³⁷ This decree reflects the ambivalent attitude of the Dutch authorities towards

32 John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and “Early Enlightenment” Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138–9.

33 Judith Belinfante, “Jewish Freedom and its Limits in Amsterdam 1592–1792”, in *Jewish Life in the Golden Age of Amsterdam 1592–1796* (Amsterdam and Tel Aviv: Joods Historisch Museum and Beth Hatefutsoth, Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1982), 3. According to Samuel Ettinger, “the Reformation from its very beginning exerted some influence in changing the attitude toward the Jews. The fact that numerous Protestant groups looked upon the Scriptures as the main source of religious authority increased interest in the Old Testament and in the Jewish traditions and commentaries, and brought about closer contact between Christian theologians and scholars and Jewish sages”; Samuel Ettinger, “The Beginning of the Change in the Attitude of European Society towards the Jews”, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 67 (1961): 195.

34 Wilhelmina C. Pieterse, “De Amsterdamse Magistraat en de Portugesche Joden in de Zeventiende Eeuw”, *Ons Amsterdam* (March 1973): 83.

35 Marshall, *John Locke*, 139.

36 Bart Wallet, “De Hofjoden: De Joden en de Oranjes”, *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad*, 27 March 2015, p. 27.

37 Arend H. Huussen, “The Legal Position of the Jews in the Dutch Republic c. 1590–1796”, in *Dutch Jewry, its History and Secular Culture (1500–2000)*, ed. Jonathan Israel and Reinier Salverda (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 31.

the emerging Jewish community. On the one hand, the magistrates fully recognized the economic significance of those merchants from Portugal and Spain, who could contribute a wealth of experience, knowledge of overseas trade routes, and valuable commercial contacts to the rapidly expanding metropolis. On the other hand, the decree's wording reveals the magistrates' suspicion as regards the religious identity of the Portuguese merchants. Around 1600, the Marranos had reconverted to Judaism and established their first community, which they named Beth Jacob.³⁸ Amsterdam's city council was divided on how to relate to the Jews: whereas the orthodox Protestants regarded the Jews as the murderers of Jesus, the libertarian council members were much more interested in the Jews' commercial attributes. Amsterdam's magistrates eventually relinquished the ideological and religious considerations, and opted in favour of the city's commercial welfare.

Thus it seems that the pragmatic approach of the authorities was key to their toleration of Jewry.³⁹ This permissiveness led to a steady migration of Jews into Amsterdam, where they significantly contributed to the city's prosperity. However, being regarded as strangers, they remained excluded from political power. Spinoza noted that the Jewish newcomers did not object to this situation, and were quite content as long as they could freely conduct their business ventures.⁴⁰ Given that publicly practising the Jewish faith in Amsterdam was still formally forbidden, the Jews – like the Catholics – were confined to worship in privacy in “clandestine” churches. But in practice, matters appeared to be more flexible: in 1612, a request by the Portuguese Jews to build a public synagogue in Amsterdam was officially rejected yet subsequently tolerated by way of jurisdiction.⁴¹

Historians agree on the fact that, even though the tolerance towards the Jews in the Netherlands in this period was a unique phenomenon, it can hardly be equated with modern liberal principles of religious freedom.⁴² Whereas this tolerance, which was mainly inspired by economic interests, allowed a certain extent of freedom of creed, the Jews remained second-class citizens. Evidencing this fact are the severe restrictions imposed on them by Amsterdam's magistrates in 1616: Jews were prohibited from criticizing the Christian religion in writing or orally, from attempting

38 Belinfante, “Jewish Freedom”, 3.

39 Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 26.

40 Baruch Spinoza, *Political Works*, 379, quoted in Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 50–51.

41 Cooperman, “Amsterdam from an International Perspective”, 6.

42 *Ibid.*, 4.

to convert Christians to Judaism or circumcise them, and from having intercourse with Christian women including prostitutes. In 1619, the States General of the Dutch Republic decreed that each city represented in the Assembly would be free to make its own regulations regarding Jews – if it chose to admit them – with the proviso that Jews were not to be compelled to wear distinguishing marks; the city magistrates were, however, entitled to assign Jews to a special closed neighbourhood. The decree of 1619 formed the legal basis for the admission of Jews, and it remained in force until 1795. This meant that Jews could freely settle in many Dutch towns and villages, attend Dutch universities, and practise medicine. But it also entailed that Jews were not admitted in some Dutch towns and villages. In addition, Jews were excluded from the guilds, which mainly affected the less affluent Jews.⁴³

According to the 1619 decree, Amsterdam's magistrates were free to determine their own policy towards the Jews. Having become one of the world's main commercial centers in the seventeenth century – hence known as the Dutch Golden Age – Amsterdam attracted many Jews, not only Sephardi from Spain and Portugal, but also, from 1628, Ashkenazi Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe. From then on, Jews could freely and openly practise their religion. General acceptance of Jews is clearly evidenced by Stadtholder Frederick Henry's visit to the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam in 1642. In the 1670s, the Portuguese and Ashkenazi communities erected their two monumental synagogues in Amsterdam, whereas the Catholics had to content themselves with "churches in hiding" until the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Strangely enough, the Dutch authorities showed much less tolerance to the rival denomination of Catholics than to the minor sect of Jews.⁴⁵

The eighteenth century, too, was characterized by a high degree of tolerance in the Dutch Republic. A liberal environment and mild censorship appealed to many enlightened philosophers, encouraging them to approach Dutch publishing houses to have their works printed in the Netherlands. This unique atmosphere was one of the contributing factors to thriving Jewish life in the Netherlands at that time.⁴⁶ The legal status of Dutch Jews remained unchanged until 1795, the year in which

43 Huussen, "Legal Position", 33–5.

44 Belinfante, "Jewish Freedom", 7.

45 Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 26.

46 Stefan Litt, "Pinkas, Kahal and the Mediene: The Records of Dutch Ashkenazi Communities in the Eighteenth Century as Historical Sources", *Studies in Jewish History and Culture* 19 (2008): 21.

the French revolutionary army occupied the Seven United Provinces. The Emancipation Decree of 1796, which was influenced by the egalitarian principles of the American Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution, granted equal civil rights to the Jews – which the Orthodox Jews were not even eager to receive, for fear of assimilation.⁴⁷ Two Jews were elected as members of the National Assembly. They were the first Jews ever to be elected to a national parliament.⁴⁸

After the French Period, which ended in 1813 when the Netherlands became a monarchy under King Willem I of Orange, the Dutch Jews maintained their legal status. But in practice, the principle of emancipation was not strictly observed: Jews were still refused access to most guilds.⁴⁹ Thus the majority of Amsterdam's Jews, who had been poor until 1796, continued to suffer from great poverty well into the nineteenth century. In 1810, more than 14,000 out of the 22,000 Jews living in Amsterdam received financial assistance from the State and the Jewish community.⁵⁰

Reactions to the assassination attempt on Carl Schwartz

Against the background of longstanding religious freedom in the Netherlands and relative tolerance towards the Dutch Jews from the seventeenth century onwards, the lack of reaction to the 1858 assassination attempt by Samuel Hirsch becomes understandable. If a similar situation, in which a Jew attempted to murder a Christian preacher in a church, had presented itself in Eastern Europe, it would probably have given rise to violence. (Violent incidents did occur in the Netherlands during the century, mainly on account of economic issues. For example, in 1845, angry mobs plundered bakeries in Haarlem and Delft in protest against soaring flour and bread prices, and the Dutch army had to intervene when a crowd of 3000 to 4000 protesters marched through The Hague.)⁵¹ Nothing of the kind happened after the attack: Samuel was apprehended by a policeman, who protected him from the angry crowd. The Jewish

47 Odette Vlessing, "The Jewish Policy of King William I", in Michman, *Dutch Jewish History*, 178.

48 Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, "Enlightenment and Emancipation from c. 1750 to 1814", in Blom et al., *History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, 180.

49 Michman et al., *Pinkas Hakehillot*, 27.

50 Karina Sonnenberg-Stern, *Emancipation and Poverty: The Ashkenazi Jews of Amsterdam 1796–1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 13–25.

51 Jeroen van Zanten, *Koning Willem II, 1792–1849* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2013), 498.

community was not harmed. Isaac da Costa, who had conducted the church service, resumed prayer with the words: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).⁵²

In the yearbook of the Free Church of Scotland, however, the reaction was far less restrained, and may even be qualified as antisemitic: “it presents us with another proof of the blindness of Jewish zeal and the strength of the hatred which animates that unhappy people against Jesus of Nazareth.”⁵³

Especially noteworthy is the reaction of Eduard Douwes Dekker, better known by his pen name Multatuli: “The young lad of Amsterdam’s Jewish corner who tried to kill the preacher Schwartz is the only consistent Israelite I have heard of for years. No follower of Moses may condemn the fact that this boy tried to eliminate someone who came to tell people that there is no law and that henceforth they must serve their God under a new regulation. Be as you are.”⁵⁴ Multatuli thus expressed his view that the Jews should take a much more assertive stance towards the aggressive practices of Christian proselytism.

In the light of this criticism, it should be noted that there were Jewish publicists who preferred to ignore the attempted assassination, possibly for fear of arousing antisemitism. Moreover, in the minutes of the Board of the Great Synagogue in Amsterdam, there is no mention of Hirsch’s assassination attempt on Schwartz.⁵⁵ This denial – which is all the more remarkable as the perpetrator was the Acting Chief Rabbi’s own brother – may reflect an urge among certain Jewish circles to downplay the risk of being defamed and thus create an illusion of total acceptance of Jews within Dutch society of that time.

The extensive obituary published in 1923 in *Het Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* in honour of Samuel Abraham Hirsch, omits the incident, once again, although the words “bitter life experience during his adolescence” allude to it. Finally, in a “necrology” that appeared several years later, Samuel Hirsch’s early life is summarized as: “Born in Holland; in his early years he studied in Berlin.”⁵⁶

52 *Het Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 21 Oct. 1999, p. 18.

53 “Mission to the Jews”, *Yearbook of the Free Church of Scotland* (1858): 30.

54 Multatuli, *Ideeën*, 7 vols. (Amsterdam: Elsevier 1918), 2: 165.

55 Municipal Archive of Amsterdam, 714, inv. no. 853 (June–Sept. 1858); inv. no. 854 (Oct.–Dec. 1858).

56 Elkan N. Adler, “Necrology: Samuel A. Hirsch”, in *American Jewish Historical Society* 31 (1928): 263–5.



1 Francisco Lopez Suasso,
by an unknown painter, last
quarter of the seventeenth
century, Amsterdams
Historisch Museum

*The House of Orange's relations with the Jews from the
seventeenth century onwards*

While the House of Orange voiced no reaction to the assassination attempt on Schwartz, it is well known that the royal family was not supportive of missionary endeavours among Jews. In order to gain a better understanding of this lack of support, we shall now survey the special relation that existed between Dutch Jews and the rulers of the House of Orange.

On the occasion of Queen Wilhelmina's inauguration in 1898, Tobias Tal, The Hague's Chief Rabbi, published a book titled *Orange Blossoms*, in which he describes the longstanding bond between the House of Orange and Dutch Jews. Rabbi Tal concluded his preface to the book with the comment: "May the import of this occasion serve to strengthen the conviction that the loyalty and love with which Dutch Israel is filled for the House of Orange, and the benevolent support Orange has always shown towards Israel, are recognized as historical truths."⁵⁷ Although Rabbi

57 Tobias Tal, *Oranjebloesems: Uit de Gedenkbladen van Neerlands Israel* (Amsterdam: van Creveld, 1898), preface, n.p.

Tal's book clearly lacks objectivity, as it invariably depicts the members of the House of Orange as the Jews' protectors and their opponents as the Jews' enemies, the general attitude of the House of Orange towards the Jews was, admittedly, positive. According to the historian Bart Wallet, this was true mainly from the eighteenth century onwards. Until then, Jews had kept away from politics while adhering to the Halakhic principle, *dina demalchuta dina* (that is, the law of the land is binding). Hence, they were in turn loyal to the city's magistrates, the States General, and the Stadtholder of Orange-Nassau, depending on whoever was in power.⁵⁸

In the seventeenth century, the special relationship between the House of Orange and the Jews had not yet developed, but the so-called "court Jews" had already assumed a distinctive position. Those were prominent figures of the Portuguese Jewish community, who provided bank funds to the Stadtholder, and performed various additional tasks.⁵⁹ Among them were members of the Curiel, Belmonte, and Machado families, who apart from extending loans also served as diplomats, and occasionally offered their hospitality to the Stadtholder.⁶⁰ A remarkable relationship existed between Willem III, Prince of Orange, and the Portuguese Jew Francisco Lopez Suasso: when Willem crossed the Channel in 1688 to invade England in what became known as the Glorious Revolution, Suasso financed this expensive enterprise. The loan he extended is estimated at 1,500,000 florins. Legend has it that when Willem asked him what he demanded as collateral, Suasso responded: "If you succeed, I know you'll repay me; and if you don't, I'll agree to lose the money."⁶¹ On the day after Willem embarked on the venture, the Portuguese Synagogue held a special service, in which the Jews of Amsterdam prayed for improved living conditions for their brethren in England.⁶² Many Dutch Jews followed after Willem and undertook the passage to England. The Portuguese Jewish community of London grew in number, and in 1701 built Bevis Marks Synagogue, in a similar contemporary style (though smaller for their smaller numbers) to the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam.⁶³

58 Bart Wallet, "De Joodse Oranjemythe", *Trouw*, 25 June 2011, at www.bart.wallet.nl/page-id=13, accessed 30 Aug. 2016.

59 Wallet, "De Hofjoden", 27.

60 Tal, *Oranjebloesems*, 65–71.

61 Daniel M. Swetschinski and Loeki Schönduive, *The Lopes Suasso Family, Bankers to William III* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1988), 51–3.

62 David B. Green, "The Banker who helped William of Orange conquer England dies", *Ha'aretz*, 22 April 2015, p. 4.

63 Wallet, "De Hofjoden", 28.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, with growing tension between the progressive-minded city merchants called “Regent-Patricians” and the conservative Orangists, Jews could no longer stay out of Dutch politics. Since the Regent-Patricians favoured economic measures that threatened to affect retail trade, in which many Jews engaged, the Jews had no choice but to side with the Orangists.⁶⁴ During the 1747 upheavals between both parties, the recently appointed Stadtholder, Willem IV, who was regarded as the patron of the Jews, got the upper hand. Jews were the first to celebrate this victory by waving orange flags and illuminating the synagogues. This occasion laid the formal basis for the Jews’ pro-Orangist sentiment.⁶⁵ The following anecdote illustrates the close relationship between the Stadtholder and the Jewish community: when Willem IV visited the estate of one of the prominent Portuguese Jewish families in 1749, he dismissed the sentry, who always accompanied the royal couple, with the words: “We don’t need a sentry here, as we are among friends.”⁶⁶ By then, the House of Orange had also established close relations with Ashkenazi Jews, such as Tobias Boas in The Hague. The latter, who was also known as the Dutch Rothschild, reportedly provided “tons of gold” to the House of Orange.⁶⁷

In 1787, the tension between the progressive and conservative parties in the Netherlands escalated into a brief civil war. The progressive party, also called the “Patriots”, were inspired by the political Enlightenment in France and England. They were mostly members of the middle classes, who were weary of the small oligarchy and eager to take over the reins.⁶⁸ As the Jews identified with the Orangists, the Patriots considered them as their enemy. This sentiment was aggravated when Willem V, after being banned from The Hague, found refuge at the house of Benjamin Cohen in Amersfoort.⁶⁹ Cohen’s house became home to the Orangists’

64 Fuks-Mansfeld, “Enlightenment and Emancipation”, 169.

65 David M. Sluijs, “Hoogduits-Joods Amsterdam van 1695 tot 1795”, in *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland*, ed. Hendrik Brugmans and Aron Frank (Amsterdam: Van Holkema en Warendorf, 1940), 371.

66 Tal, *Oranjebloesems*, 84.

67 Jacob Zwarts, “De Joodse Gemeenten buiten Amsterdam”, in Brugmans and Frank, *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland*, 419.

68 Leo Fuks and Renate Fuks, “Een Portugese Kroniek over het Einde van de Patriotentijd door David Franco Mendes”, *Studia Rosenthaliana* 7 (1973): 38.

69 Jozeph Michman, “Parnassijns en Patriotten”, *75th Yearbook of Amstelodamum* (1983): 83. Michman describes Cohen as “a banker and tobacco trader, who had lived in Amersfoort but moved in 1786 to Amsterdam. Benjamin Cohen was believed to be the richest Jew in the Netherlands.”

headquarters.⁷⁰ During the civil war, Jews endured harassment from the Patriots, especially in Amsterdam. Willem V was eventually rehabilitated, thanks to the assistance of armed forces sent by Willem's brother-in-law, King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia. When Willem V, the Jews' patron, returned to power, the Jewish community of Amsterdam was overjoyed.⁷¹ Following the outcome of the civil war, relations between the House of Orange and Jews became even tighter.

After the French army invaded the Dutch Republic in 1795, the role of the House of Orange was temporarily suspended. The Stadtholder was forced to leave for England, and it was not until 1813 that his son returned to the Netherlands as Willem I of the newly established monarchy. The crowning of Willem as King of the Netherlands was warmly acclaimed in Amsterdam's Jewish quarter.⁷² The Jews' devotion to the House of Orange was so strong that the authorities could even advance controversial integrative measures, such as the banning of Yiddish, and various minor religious innovations. Meanwhile, the position of the king had thoroughly changed as compared to the eighteenth century: the House of Orange no longer ruled over a political party, but from now on strove to embrace a united kingdom. Thus Orangism became a harmonizing ideology that transcended party politics.⁷³ The devotion of Dutch Jews to the House of Orange also persisted during the reign of King Willem II (1840–49). In 1848, when a new constitution entailing a separation of church and state came into force, the Jewish community was no longer subject to the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but became autonomous.⁷⁴

*The House of Orange's stance on the mission among Jews
in the nineteenth century*

In the light of the excellent relations that had prevailed for more than a century between the Jewish community and the House of Orange, the lack of reaction to the assassination attempt by Samuel Hirsch in 1858 becomes even more understandable. A decade earlier, in 1848, King Willem II had turned down Capadose's request to grant royal recognition to a missionary association, which by a stroke of irony was named

70 Wallet, "De Joodse Oranjemythe"; Jacob Zwartz, "Prinselijk Verblijf ten Huize van een Amersfoortschen Jood in 1786", *De Vrijdagavond* 2, no. 14, pt. 3 (1925): 236–8.

71 Wallet, "De Joodse Oranjemythe".

72 Michman et al., *Pinkas Hakehillot*, 26–32.

73 Wallet, "De Joodse Oranjemythe".

74 Michman et al., *Pinkas Hakehillot*, 31–2; van Zanten, *Koning Willem II*, 570–71.

“The Friends of Israel”.⁷⁵ King Willem thus manifested his principles regarding non-intervention in religious affairs, which he regarded as a private concern, in which the state should mingle as little as possible.⁷⁶ Moreover, Willem was led by his aspiration to maintain unity within his kingdom, a difficult task considering the political and religious diversity of the Netherlands.⁷⁷ In his view, it was contrary to the common interest that members of one accepted (and thus lawfully protected) religious community should be allowed to proselytize members of another accepted (and equally protected) religious community.⁷⁸ Capadose suspected that the reason for the denial of royal recognition may have been the King’s awareness of the discord between the Reformed denominations.⁷⁹ But he also attributed the King’s decision to the fact that missionary activities could be dangerous, as evidenced by an incident in which a group of Jews shattered the windows of a Christian school for Jewish children.⁸⁰

The pardon requests on behalf of Samuel Abraham Hirsch

A year after the sentence, Samuel’s mother wrote an impassioned appeal for pardon for her son. She stated that until the day of the “fatal and inexplicable deed, Samuel was loved by his teachers and peers alike for his impeccable behaviour, mild temper, and modesty”. Aaltje Hirsch declared that he felt the deepest remorse for his act, and implored the King to show compassion for her as a widow and mother of thirteen children. She explained that “she lived solely for the significant and difficult task of guiding her numerous offspring along the road of virtue, godliness, love, and tolerance towards becoming useful members of society. All had met her expectations, with the exception of this one and only act.” She added that her son had served eight months in Amsterdam and nine months in Rotterdam, and that “his upright conduct and exemplary penance had won everyone’s heart.” Aaltje proposed that Samuel “should leave his homeland and not return to it until the memory of the sad event be erased”. She suggested that he travel to Mainz, where “a reputable and longtime friend of her late husband was willing to take him straight away under his paternal custody in order to complete his moral and social education.”

75 De Greef, *Messiasbelijdende Joden*, 14.

76 Van Zanten, *Koning Willem II*, 402.

77 *Ibid.*, 378.

78 National Archive of The Hague, minutes of the King’s cabinet, 19 Nov. 1846, 87.

79 Van Gelderen, “Protestantism and the Jews”, 328.

80 M. Elisabeth Kluit, *Nader over het Réveil* (Kampen: Kok, 1977), 152–3.

The Supreme Court, however, in its ruling of 26 January 1860, concurred with the Attorney General and rejected the request for pardon, stating that “the dangerous though youthful criminal had certainly not sufficiently atoned for his felony and undoubtedly not met the demands of Justice.” King Willem III ratified the ruling on 21 February 1860, but decided to reduce the twelve-year sentence by two years.⁸¹ On 5 March 1862, Samuel’s mother once again appealed for pardon. Her new petition differed little from the previous one, but this time she mentioned an older brother of Samuel, who taught religion abroad and was prepared “to take him under his brotherly supervision”. Attached to the petition was a letter from a Jewish teacher who had visited the Jewish detainees, in which he commended Samuel’s modesty and forbearance and stressed his deep repentance for his deed. Attorney L. H. Vouten requested the pardon on the grounds that the crime “was not a result of viciousness, but merely of an utter misinterpretation of religious notions”. The Attorney General once again voiced his objection, but on 26 April 1862, the King issued a Royal Decree granting Samuel full pardon.⁸² Samuel Abraham Hirsch was released from prison at the age of nineteen, having served almost four years, and left for Germany to pursue his studies. There is no record of his ever having returned to the Netherlands. Still, it may be assumed that he visited his mother and other relatives on a regular basis.

Samuel Abraham Hirsch the scholar

Samuel soon adjusted to his regained freedom. In 1863, he started studying philology, philosophy, and history at Berlin University. He had made good use of the time spent in the correctional institution and had gained proficiency in the classical, modern, and Semitic languages. Furthermore, he studied Jewish Sciences at the talmudic school under Rabbi Rosenstein. In 1867, he was appointed as a teacher at the Jewish high school of the famous Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (not related) in Frankfurt am Main. Two years later he received his doctoral degree from the University of Heidelberg.⁸³ He married Theophilie Polack in Frankfurt in 1870. They spent several years in his wife’s home town of Minsk, and had seven children.⁸⁴ Hirsch moved to London in 1879 and became a lecturer at Jews’

81 National Archive of The Hague, index of the year 1860, 519, inv. no. 4443; 125, inv. no. 1728.

82 Ibid., index of the year 1862, 941, 1480, 172, inv. no. 1834.

83 *De Joodsche Prins*, 20 March 1913, 250.

84 Mayer-Hirsch, *Wie zijn de voorouders*, 9.

College in succession to Dr. Hermann Adler, who was appointed Chief Rabbi of the British Empire.

Hirsch revealed himself as a brilliant scholar, and displayed an almost encyclopedic knowledge in numerous fields. He was as familiar with British authors of the nineteenth century as with the rabbinical literature.⁸⁵ His outstanding English translation of a Hebrew manuscript by an anonymous French Jewish scholar from the thirteenth or fourteenth century was widely praised.⁸⁶ He published scholarly articles on various subjects, the most important of which was on the Jewish Temple at Leontopolis.⁸⁷ Collections of his articles were published as books.⁸⁸ In his *Book of Essays*, he is referred to as the co-editor of *The Greek Grammar of Roger Bacon and a fragment of Hebrew Grammar* (Elkan Adler mentions in his “Necrology” that Hirsch was a guest of Oxford University at an official luncheon celebrating the unveiling of a statue of Bacon, highlighting Hirsch’s standing as a recognized authority on Bacon).⁸⁹ A letter sent by Hirsch to Chief Rabbi Adler provides additional evidence of his standing as a Jewish scholar. In response to the Chief Rabbi who had requested his advice concerning a certain Hebrew word in a liturgical poem, Hirsch wrote: “I would not touch it if I were you”.⁹⁰ As noted earlier, Hirsch was also the editor-in-chief of *Palestine*, *The Chovevei Zion Quarterly* and *The Jewish Standard*, the mouthpiece of the Orthodox Jewish community. In 1912, he was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus at Jews’ College (now known as the London School of Jewish Studies).⁹¹

Samuel Hirsch was popular as a teacher and lecturer. He is repeatedly described as a friend of his students and as a tutor who cared about his students’ interests. Hirsch was an excellent pedagogue, whose humour was also much appreciated.⁹²

85 Adler, “Necrology: Samuel A. Hirsch”, 263–5.

86 Samuel A. Hirsch, trans., *A Commentary on the Book of Job from a Hebrew Manuscript in the University Library*, Cambridge (London: Williams and Norgate, 1905); *De Joodsche Prins*, 20 March 1913, 250.

87 Samuel A. Hirsch, “The Temple of Onias”, *Jews’ College Jubilee Volume* (London: Luzac, 1906), 39–100.

88 Samuel A. Hirsch, *A Book of Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1905); Samuel A. Hirsch, *The Cabbalists and Other Essays* (Port Washington, NY and London: Kennikat Press, 1922).

89 Adler, “Necrology: Samuel A. Hirsch”, 264

90 Jerusalem, Hebrew University, National Library, Archive 159, Samuel A. Hirsch koltuv@netvision.net.il to Herman Adler, letter of 14 July 1907.

91 Adler, “Necrology: Samuel A. Hirsch”, 263.

92 *De Joodsche Prins*, 20 March 1913, 250.

2
Dr. Samuel Abraham Hirsch,
Professor Emeritus at Jews'
College, London, photographed
on his 70th birthday, 1913



Samuel Abraham Hirsch the person

An image has emerged of an endearing person, a man esteemed for his fine character. The anonymous author (who obviously knew Samuel in person) of a Dutch obituary of 26 October 1923 wrote that his kindness was so heartwarming that one “could hardly escape the charm of his personality”. The same author further quoted Samuel’s own words describing his home: “That house was permeated with spiritual life. As regards ethical perfection, I have attended lectures on ethics by men renowned in this field. I have thoroughly read plenty of ethical treatises. But what did they teach me, in comparison with the lessons taught by my mother in words and example, and by my eldest brother who watched over me with fatherly care; and indirectly by the father whom I never knew, but of whose life I was reminded day and night? If I may have succeeded in my long career as teacher, I ascribe it above all to them.”⁹³

***Note on contributor**

Independent scholar. Jaap Colthof, a psychologist, lives in Jerusalem and works in its ultra-Orthodox community. He is preparing a book in Dutch on Abraham Prins, one of the founders of the Pekidim and Amarcalim (Officers and Treasurers) organization, which had its centre in Amsterdam. He recently published a short article in the Dutch Jewish weekly NIW about Sandy’s Row synagogue in London’s East End.
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93 Samuel Hirsch quoted in *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad*, 26 Oct. 1923, p. 1.