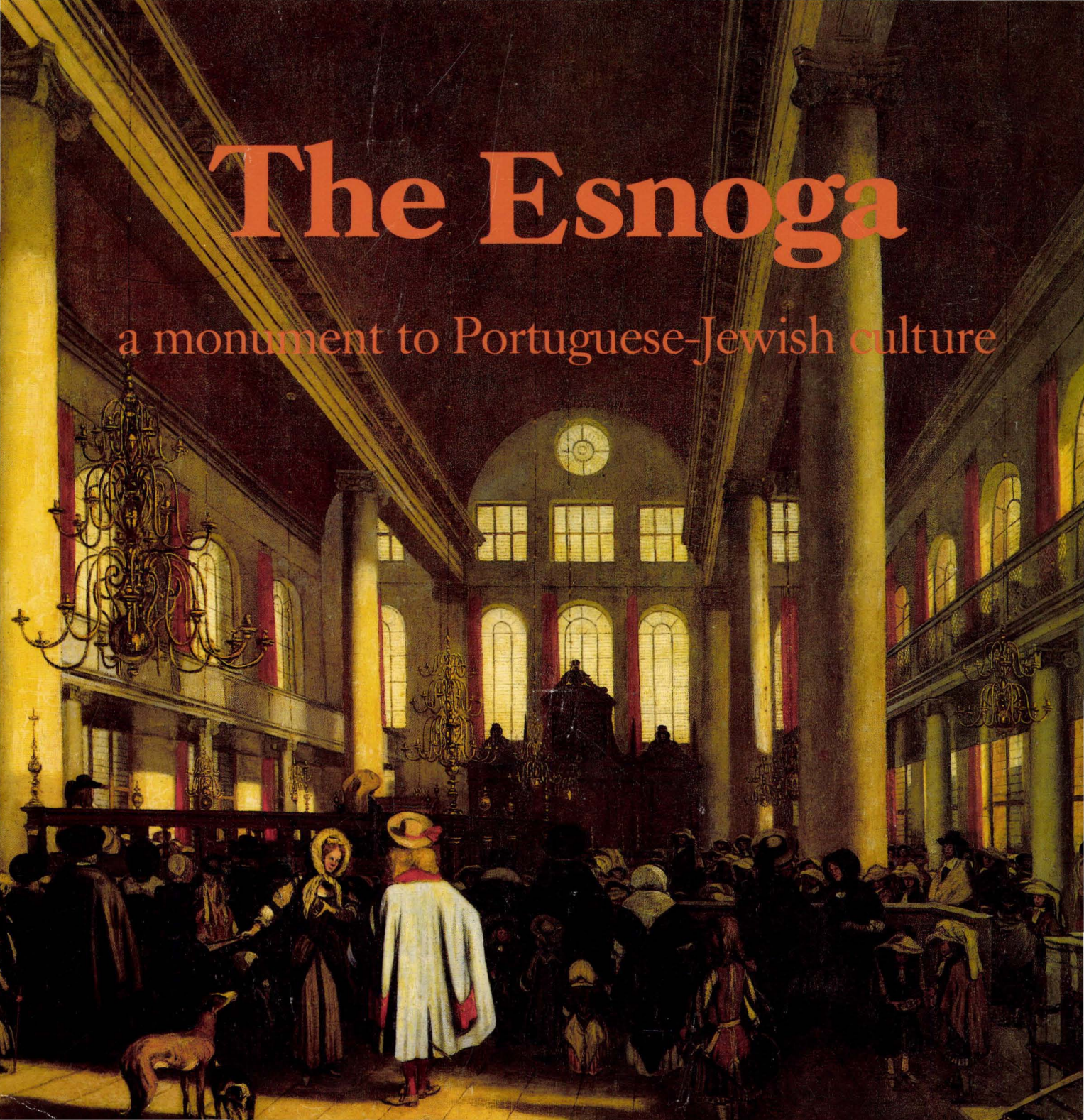
The Esnoga

a monument to Portuguese-Jewish culture



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Judith C.E. Belinfante
Edward van Voolen
David P. Cohen Paraira
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D'ARTS Amsterdam 1991

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Back:
Gerrit A. Berckheyde (1638-1698), *View of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi synagogues in Amsterdam,* late 17th century (detail). Oil on canvas, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main
Detail of a map of Amsterdam, Daniel Stalpaert, 1674, Municipal Archives, Amsterdam

Colophon

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The interior of the Esnoga during a service (C. Vreedenburgh, 1923. Canvas, 81 x 60,5 cm, Portuguese Congregation, Amsterdam)

Foreword

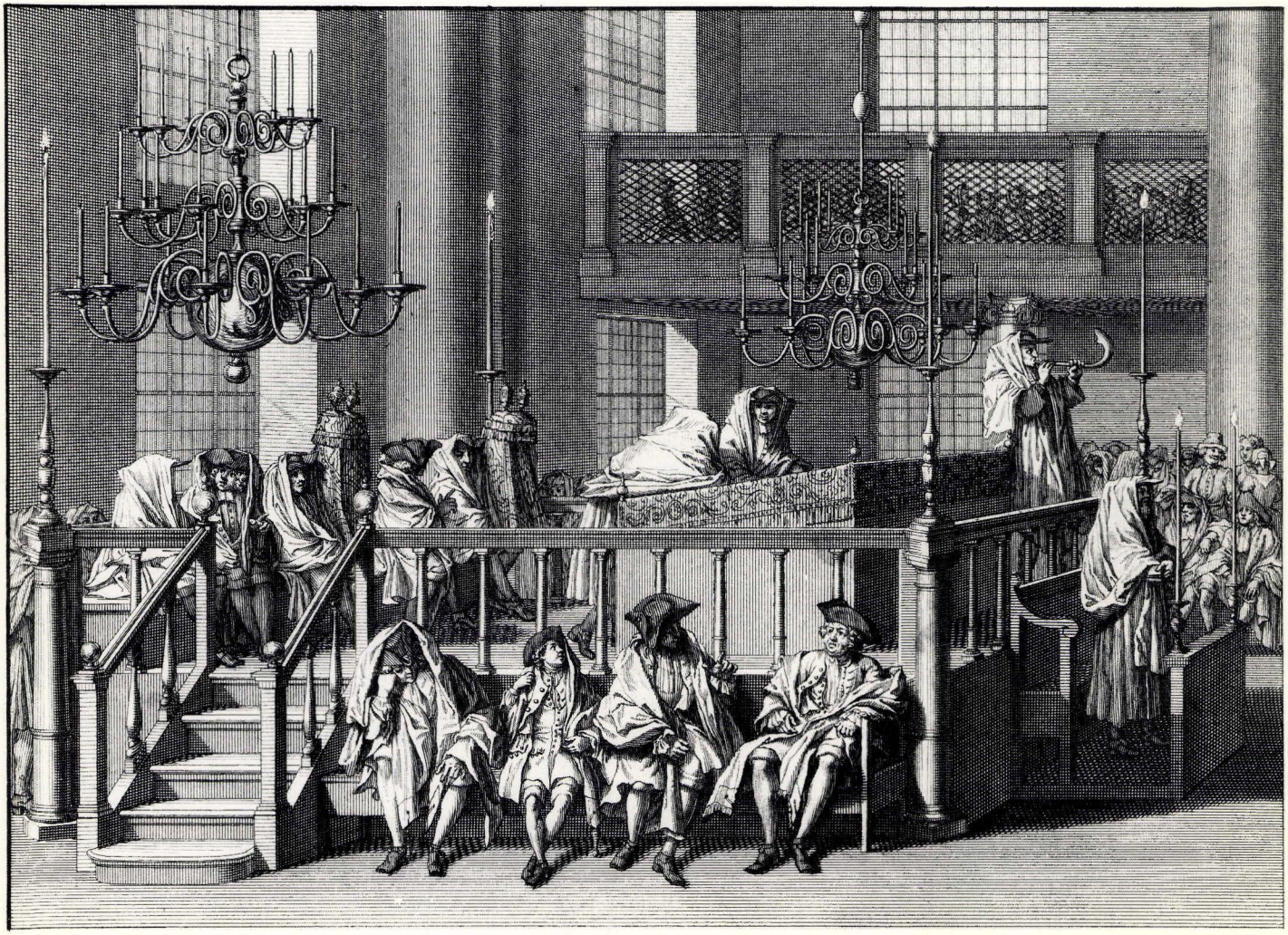
With the tremendous increase in interest in our Esnoga as a result of the extensive restoration project, we realised that there was considerable demand for more information about our synagogue and the history of our congregation. Most Amsterdammers know the Esnoga, as do many people from outside the city, yet few have actually been inside the building. Perhaps this is because the synagogue complex looks so forbidding from the outside. Yet the Esnoga is open to all visitors and it is our sincere hope that this volume, in which we have opened our doors in print, will encourage many more to come and visit our synagogue.

This book is primarily intended for those less familiar with the history and traditions of Amsterdam's Sephardi congregation. Nevertheless, those who know more about the subject will also be able to find plenty of information which will be new to them. Various objects have been illustrated here for the first time, and also included are discussions on the origins and use of certain ritual objects which have never been described in print before.

Many people have contributed to the realisation of this publication. I should firstly like to mention Rafael Shibolet and Rob van Zoest, the initiators of this project. Moreover, this publication could not have been realised without the assistance of the Jewish Historical Museum. Judith Belinfante, the director of the museum, wrote the introductory article about the history of the Sephardi Jews and the Sephardi traditions of Amsterdam. Edward van Voolen, curator, wrote about the role of the synagogue in Judaism, and Julie-Marthe Cohen, research assistant, discussed the various ritual objects of the Esnoga. This book also includes an article on the history of Ets Haim by Jaffa Baruch-Sznaj, librarian of this famous book collection. My own article on the architectural history of the Esnoga includes various essential contributions by Ernest Kurpershoek. Indeed, it has been an honour for me to be able to contribute to the historiography of our congregation, and to follow in the footsteps of my great-grandfather Dr M.C. Paraira, who co-wrote the commemorative publication of Talmud Tora and Ets Haim which appeared in 1916.

Apart from the writers I should also like

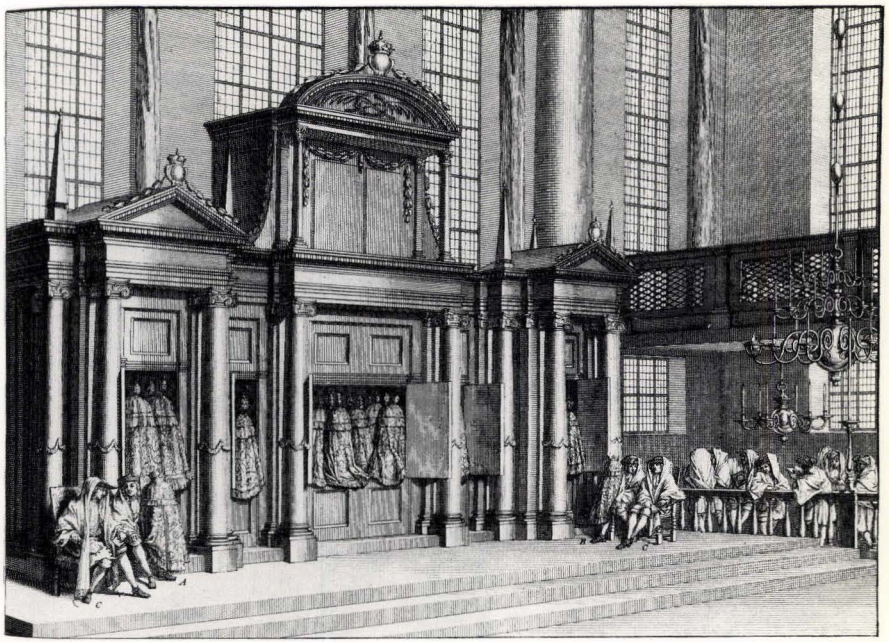
Service in the Esnoga at Rosh Hashanah
(Bernard Picart, 1725. Engraving, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam)



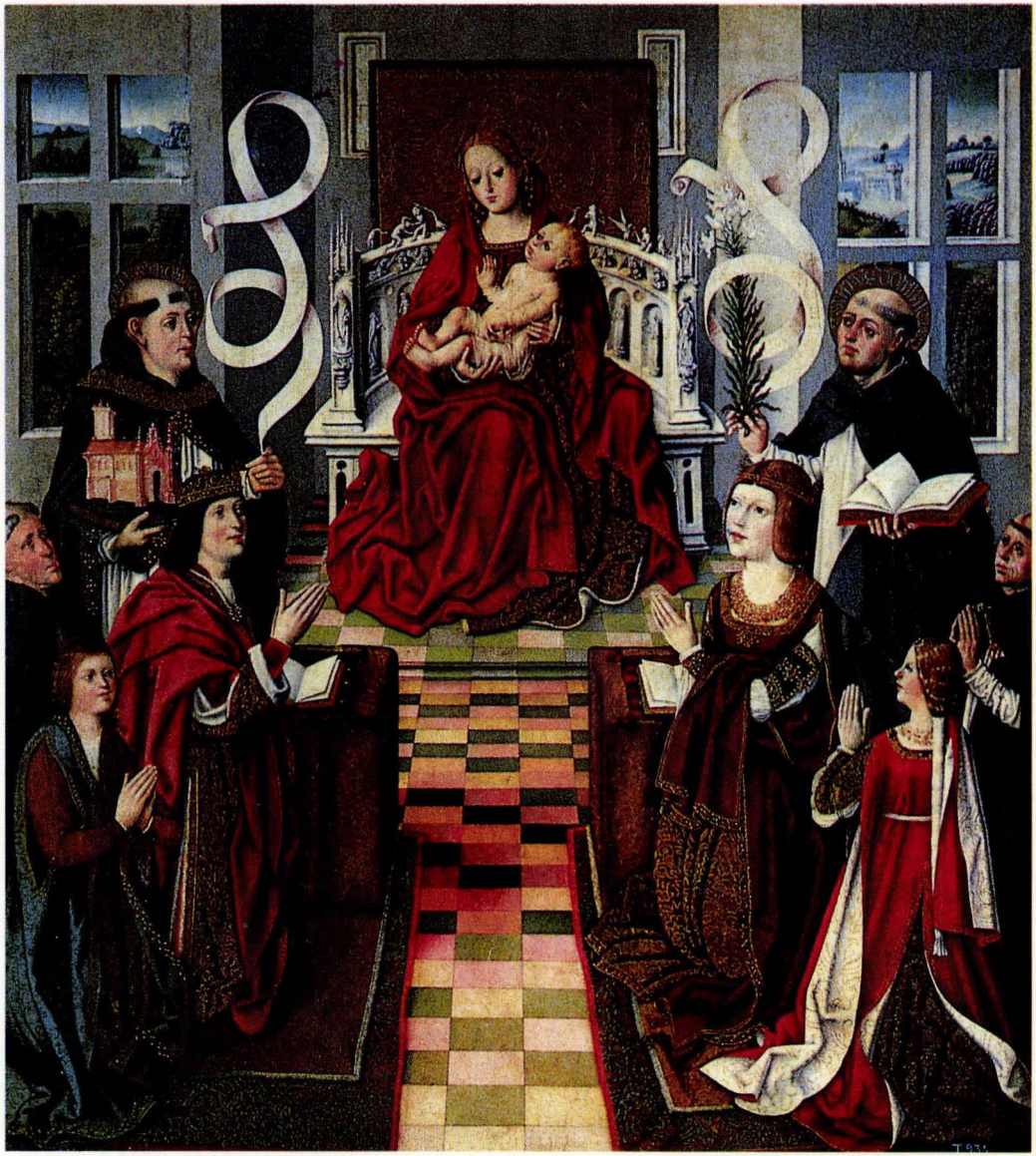
to thank the many others who contributed to this publication. Rabbi B. Drukarch, Rabbi H. Rodrigues Pereira, Mr I.L. Palache, Mr L.M. Dinkeloo, Mr I. Brautigam, Mr B. Baanders and Dr C. W. Pieterse have been of assistance to the producers of this volume. Much of the research into the ceremonial objects was done by Reinier van 't Zelfde, Susan Meijer, Wilma Bouwmeester, Cecilia Niers and Petronella Rol. We are also greatly indebted to the Foundation of Friends of the Portuguese Synagogue for their contribution to the photographic documentation as well as to Anton Kras of the Jewish Historical Museum. We are also grateful to the head of Media and Cultural Affairs at the Netherlands Embassy in Madrid, Jan E. Boeles and his assistant Liesbeth Escribano-van Hoolwerff, for their help in providing photographic and source material from Spain.

Naturally I should also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the sponsors and institutions who are mentioned elsewhere. They played an essential part in the realisation of this tribute to our Esnoga.

Ing. David P. Cohen Paraira
Chairman of the Board of Parnassim of the Portuguese Congregation, Amsterdam



The hechal in the Esnoga during Simchath Torah (Bernard Picart, 1725. Engraving, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam)



Altar-piece with portraits of the Catholic monarchs: the larger figure kneeling, left, is Ferdinand of Aragon; right, Isabella of Castile. Behind Ferdinand, Tomas de Torquemada, the grand inquisitor. (Anonymous, c. 1490. Panel, 123 x 112 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid)

The Sephardis, the Jews of Spain

Judith C.E. Belinfante

Sephardis. The Jews of Sepharad, or Spain. What images are evoked by this name? The service for Yom Kippur held by candlelight in the 17th-century synagogue of the Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, or the Jewish communities – now virtually gone – of Djerba in Tunisia, of Salonica or Belgrade, which once all belonged to the same Muslim empire? Or people, like Elias Canetti, who writes in German, or the Dutch sculptor Josef Mendes da Costa or the Israeli president Yitzhak Navon? The flourishing communities in France of Jews who left Algiers and Tunis after the end of colonial rule, or the people on the lower levels of Israeli society in the 1950s and 1960s?

The name 'Sephardi' has widely differing connotations, which in turn raise various questions. Do these groups and these people really belong together and, if so, what is it that connects them? The Sephardis share a common origin: they are all descendants of the Jews who were driven out of Spain five hundred years ago.

In 1492 CE the Catholic monarchs Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon conquered Granada, the sole surviving Muslim kingdom in the Iberian peninsula. After a struggle lasting almost eight hundred years, Spain was again a Christian country. The first Muslims had entered Spain in triumph in 711. By 734 they had reached Poitiers, where their advance was stopped by Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne. From then on the Christians thought of Spain as occupied territory which must be reconquered, and they achieved their first successes in 1037.

In Western histories of this period the Christian perspective has been dominant. But from the viewpoint of Jewish history, and when considering what the Sephardis have in common, it is much more important to realise that two non-Christian cultures dominated the Iberian peninsula for hundreds of years. Two different cultures with two different faiths, Judaism and Islam, existed side by side, in cooperation but also in conflict. In the history of the Spanish Jews, the Christians were not a significant factor until after they had reconquered Spain.

For most of their history Jews have lived as a minority among other peoples, with no state of their own and no fixed spiritual centre to which they could turn.
The elements which bind the Jews together in the diaspora are the Jewish faith, which is also a way of life because of its rules, and the language and script of that faith, Hebrew.

The Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, and the Tanach, the Hebrew Bible or the entire Old Testament, were originally written in Hebrew. In the 2nd century the orally transmitted traditional rules were written down in Hebrew and were later to become the first part of the Talmud. But the second part, consisting of commentaries on the first and written several centuries later, was largely in Aramaic, the vernacular used throughout the Middle East at the time. Hebrew became a sacred language. It is only recently, under the influence of political Zionism, that Hebrew has again been used as an everyday vernacular. Because Hebrew was not a vernacular language, the Jews relied for the basis of their culture, for something as essential as communicating between themselves, on the language of the country where they lived. In this sense adaptation was a necessity for survival.
In the diaspora until the 1920s and 1930s the Jews used either the language of the country where they lived or a so-called 'Judaeo-language', usually a mixture of a non-Jewish language with Hebrew words which was written in Hebrew letters.
One of the best known examples is Yiddish. The Sephardis who later settled in the Ottoman Empire developed Judaeo-Spanish or Ladino. This was basically 15th-century Spanish written in Hebrew script.

Every society which Jews came to be a part of had its own views as to the place they might occupy. Three factors were usually decisive: first, the culture and religion of the society itself, and how forcefully this was to be expressed; second, its economic position; third, the benefits to be derived from having the Jews, generally in an economic sense. Thus both Christians and Muslims could put aside their prejudices in times when Jews could contribute to economic growth, and a blind eye would be turned to non-observance of discriminatory measures. But when growth stopped or the religious and cultural differences were felt more strongly, the old measures could be readopted and new, stricter ones introduced. So the position of the Jews was everywhere dependent on the rulers of the country or city where they lived and on conditions over which they generally exercised no influence whatever.

What was the position of the Jews in medieval Spain? To answer this question, we must first look at the attitudes of Islam and Christianity towards Judaism. In Islam the Jews are unclean unbelievers or 'dhimmis' whom devout Muslims may not touch. This is why Jews in Muslim countries had to wear a sign, even in the bathhouse since both Jews and Muslims were circumcised. In addition, the Muslims stipulated that the head coverings of Jews must be yellow. On the other hand, they respected the common elements in Islam and Judaism, which had preceded their

faith, and the Jews were allowed to go on practising their religion without being persecuted. As a result, despite the Jews' status as 'dhimmis', in times of prosperity there were intensive contacts between Jews and Muslims.

Especially from the 4th century, when it had become the state religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity came to regard the Jewish faith, from which it had itself originated, as an enemy. The common origins were forgotten. In the eyes of Christians the Jews were the murderers of Christ, a point which tended to be emphasised at times of religious fanaticism. In the 12th and 13th centuries the Crusaders murdered large numbers of Jews in Germany while on their way to free the Holy Land from the Muslims. But Jews were also seen as a threat at times when the Roman Catholic Church, the only Christian church in the West in the Middle Ages, was weakened by internal dissension. So what began as a battle against heresy within the Church's own ranks often turned into persecution of the Jews.

At the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils held in Rome in 1176 and 1215, wide-ranging steps were taken to deal with the Albigensian heresy in southern France. The local rulers were to exterminate the heretics. In addition, where this was not already the case, Jews were to be separated from Christians. In 1215 the Pope resolved that Jews should be forced to live in special closed areas in cities and to wear a visible mark. This decision had to be implemented, however, by kings and local rulers and it was to be a long time, sometimes centuries, before this was done. In the battle against heresy the Church took two other measures which were later to be of great significance for the Spanish Jews. In 1216 the Dominican Order was founded: it was to bring the heretics back to the Church through its religious zeal, and it provided the 'inquirers into belief'. In 1229 a start was made with the process of unmasking heretics by means of an inquiry into their beliefs or 'inquisitio'. The Inquisition was born.

Jews in Spain, 711-1391

Jews had probably lived on the Iberian peninsula since Roman times. At first they were left in peace, but after the Visigoth king Recared was converted to Christianity in 587, he forced the Jews to be baptised too. The arrival of the Muslim conquerors in 711 was a liberation, and the Jews went back to their own faith.

Under the Umayyad dynasty (755-1031), Jews and Christians lived in peace as fully accepted and equal participants in social, economic and cultural life. Muslim Spain had the largest population of Jews in all Europe. There were thriving Jewish communities, and individual Jews could have careers in the service of the Muslim rulers.

The 10th century is known as the Golden Age in the history of the Spanish Jews. They had a command of Arabic as well as Hebrew, and Jewish poets wrote in both languages. Hebrew grammar acquired an Arabic basis at this time. The Muslim, Jewish and Christian cultures interacted not only in language, but in the development of

medicine, mathematics, philosophy (where Arabic translations of works by Plato and Aristotle played an important role), architecture and applied art. This was to have a lasting influence throughout Western Europe.

The Spanish kings made constant attacks from northern Spain on the Muslim part of the Iberian peninsula. Between 1080 and 1150 they conquered the north as far as Toledo, and between 1212 and 1250 Seville, Cordoba and Murcia followed. Only the kingdom of Granada was left in Muslim hands.

The Jews encountered by the Christians in the reconquered territories had meanwhile been deprived of their privileges by the Almohad dynasty (1130-1269). Many had left the country, including the philosopher, scholar and physician Maimonides, who had moved to Cairo. As in 711, the Jews had hopes of a better life, but now under the new Christian rulers. Jews had been trustworthy administrators under the Muslim rulers and were often tax collectors. The Christians were keen to make use of Jewish expertise and knowledge of Arabic in the newly reconquered territories, because their victory did not mark the end of Muslim influence on Spanish culture. The Christians, who came from the rugged and cold upland plains, could offer nothing of their own at that time to replace the highly advanced and sophisticated culture of the Muslims. In Spanish-Jewish culture, too, Muslim influence persisted for a long time. Toledo was reconquered in 1085 but the two synagogues, later to become the churches Santa Maria La Blanca (c. 1200) and El Transito (1357), have all the characteristics of Muslim architecture. In El Transito the Arab workmen put their names in the decoration high in the roof and filled the rest of the surface with purely decorative, meaningless Arabic letters. Even early Sephardi marriage certificates from Venice, where many Sephardis settled in the late 16th century, still betray Muslim influence.

So far we have treated the Spanish Jews as if they were a socially homogeneous group. The reality, of course, was rather different. As always, it is the scholars, the high officials, the physicians and intellectuals who have secured a place in history, but humble artisans and shopkeepers made up a large part of the population. As had been customary under the Muslims, they lived in a special quarter, the 'judería'. This sometimes had a wall and gates so that it could be defended separately if need be. The Jewish quarters in Spanish cities were not created in response to the Pope's order of 1215 but already existed before the Christian reconquest. In Muslim cities the Christians had also had their own quarter, as still exists in the old city of Jerusalem. Although they were not obliged to by the Christian rulers, the Jews went on living in their own quarter.

New Christians in Spain, 1391-1492

The initial peace under the Christian conquerors was abruptly broken in 1391. Various factors combined to create an atmosphere in which pent-up hatred and

fear could erupt: the continuing unrest within the Catholic Church, the activities of the Dominicans but also the Franciscans preaching for humble folk, the fear of heretics, and the public debates between Jews and Christians which were ordered by the authorities and always ended in defeat for the former. On Ash Wednesday 1391 a mob forced its way into the judería of Seville. The ringleaders were punished, but the tide could not be stopped. Thousands of Jews were killed, and the survivors chose baptism. The movement spread to other Spanish cities, with the same results everywhere – deaths and baptisms. No accurate statistics are available: according to legend, there were fifty thousand deaths and one hundred thousand baptisms, but these figures are certainly too high. There is no doubt, however, that Jewish life in Castile broke down completely between 1391 and 1412. Those who had the chance fled to safer, usually Muslim, areas.

One of the questions raised by this episode is why so many Jews had themselves baptised. In one Islamic view, conversion to another faith is permissible to save one's life, provided that one remains true to the old belief. This doctrine may have influenced the growth of a group which played a major part in the history of the Jews in Spain and later Portugal – the converts or 'New Christians'. To the outside world they were Christians, but at home and within the family circle they kept up Jewish customs and practices. The events of 1391 were only the beginning of a typically Iberian development which would eventually lead not only to the pain and sorrow of persecution by the Inquisition, but to the founding of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam.

To return to 1391: many thousands of Jews had supposedly been converted. In official documents they were called 'cristianos nuevos' (New Christians) or 'conversos' (converts). The name 'Marranos', derived from 'marrano' or pig, was originally a term of abuse and is only found in non-official texts. In Hebrew two words are used: 'anusim' (forced apostates) and 'meshummadim' (voluntary apostates).

How did these people fare in their new circumstances? As always, those who had already acquired a position in society found it easier to adapt. The officials, tax collectors, intellectuals and financiers already had close connections with the courts of Castile and Aragon. Now that they were New Christians, they were free of the social impediments they had known as Jews. They could behave as courtiers, rivalling the Spanish nobles in the splendour of their appearance. However influential, as Jews they had had to observe certain restrictions as to their dress. They could also now marry within their own social class, and all careers were open to them. Some made use of the opportunities offered and were indeed absorbed into the cream of Spanish society.

At this time a school of thought originated among Spanish intellectuals, both Jews and Christians, which was far removed from religious belief. It was influenced by the ideas of the Arab philosopher Averroës. The motto of its adherents reflects their coolly rational

approach to life: *'Being born and dying: all the rest is snare and delusion'*. In a society characterised by growing religious fanaticism, these rationalists were distrusted by both Jews and Christians.

In the lower and middle classes the New Christians found it more difficult to adapt. As small traders, shopkeepers and artisans, they were looked down on by the rest of society. So in several cities they went on living in the Jewish quarter, and elsewhere they stayed close to it.

Certainly in the cities in that part of the Iberian peninsula which had been under Muslim rule until the beginning of the 13th century, Christians and Jews were on an equal footing in everyday life. Both groups had been tolerated by the Muslims, although they had been required to live in special quarters. Where there was no Christian quarter, Christian travellers stayed in the Jewish quarter. So they were used to getting on with each other. And now the conversions had often split families right down the middle: parents suddenly had Jewish and Christian children; sisters named their converted brothers in their wills. Under these circumstances it was particularly difficult to bring about the separation of Jews and Christians which had been the aim of the Popes since 1215.

As the pressure on them eased somewhat between 1391 and 1412, many New Christians and their children began to reflect on their origins. They gradually returned to their former faith, a process the Church called 'Judaisation'. They went to synagogue as well as church, as documents show, and they celebrated the Jewish festivals. They observed Jewish dietary and funerary laws and fasted on Yom Kippur. The women celebrated Purim, the feast of Esther. They had Jewish prayer books, learnt Hebrew and had their own butchers for kosher meat. There were close ties between these New Christians, who continued to practise the Christian religion in public, and the Jews. Like the latter, they looked down on those who had become genuine Christians and had advanced their careers as a result. The outside world also regarded the New Christians, who were to be found at every level of society, as Jews.

This situation continued until 1449. In Aragon the Inquisition left the New Christians alone, and in Castile there was no Inquisition. But problems were bound to arise at a time when elsewhere in Europe there was growing pressure for Jews and Christians to be separated, while continuing unrest within the Church only increased religious fervour. Moreover, it was apparent to all that some of the power of the State was in the hands of Jews or New Christians. Religious and economic motives combined to produce an uprising in Toledo in 1449 which was sparked off by a tax reform. The dislike of New Christians, which was felt throughout the city's population, came to a head. This revolt against the authority of the king made the identity of the New Christians a political issue and marked the beginning of a new period.

From 1449 onwards dislike of the Jews and hence the New Christians increased. Anti-Semitic books were written. The New Christians responded in their own defence,

even going to the extreme of claiming that they had sent warnings from Spain to Jerusalem against crucifying Christ. In this to our eyes childish way, they hoped to persuade their enemies that they had had nothing to do with the death of Christ. All this was in vain. It was during the 15th century that it was first written, albeit in a satirical work, that pure Spanish blood must not be mixed with the unclean blood of Jews. In the following centuries 'limpieza de sangre' or the 'purity of blood' would often be used as an argument for keeping New Christians out of certain positions.

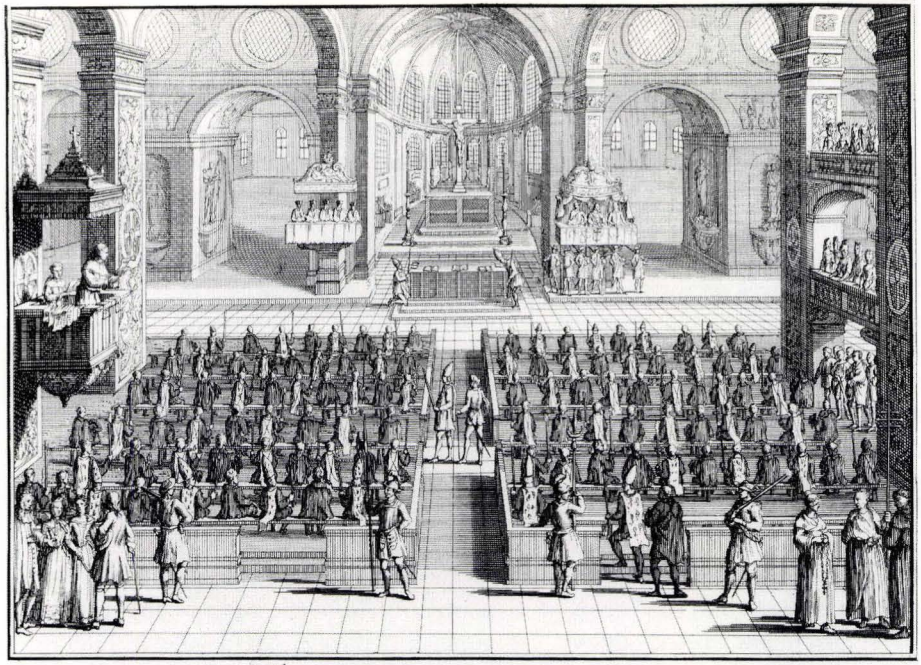
In 1455 the Pope gave permission for an inquisition by the bishops into the beliefs of the New Christians. It was carried out by the Church itself and was less sinister than the inquiries conducted by the Inquisition as a separate institution after 1478. Nonetheless, it marked the beginning of the end for the Jews in Spain, because in the eyes of the authorities the New Christians were unmistakably Jews. The only way to make them really belong to the Church was to cut them off from Jewish influence. The pressure on both communities, the Jews and the New Christians, gradually mounted. In 1473 there were anti-New Christian riots in Cordoba and Seville. They were so violent that refugees again fled the country for Italy and the Ottoman Empire.

The Catholic monarchs, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, were married in 1469. Ten years later their kingdoms were united, making them the rulers of all Spain except for Muslim Granada. Under growing pressure from all classes, they decided to cleanse the realm of religiously unsound elements such as heretics, Muslims and Jews.

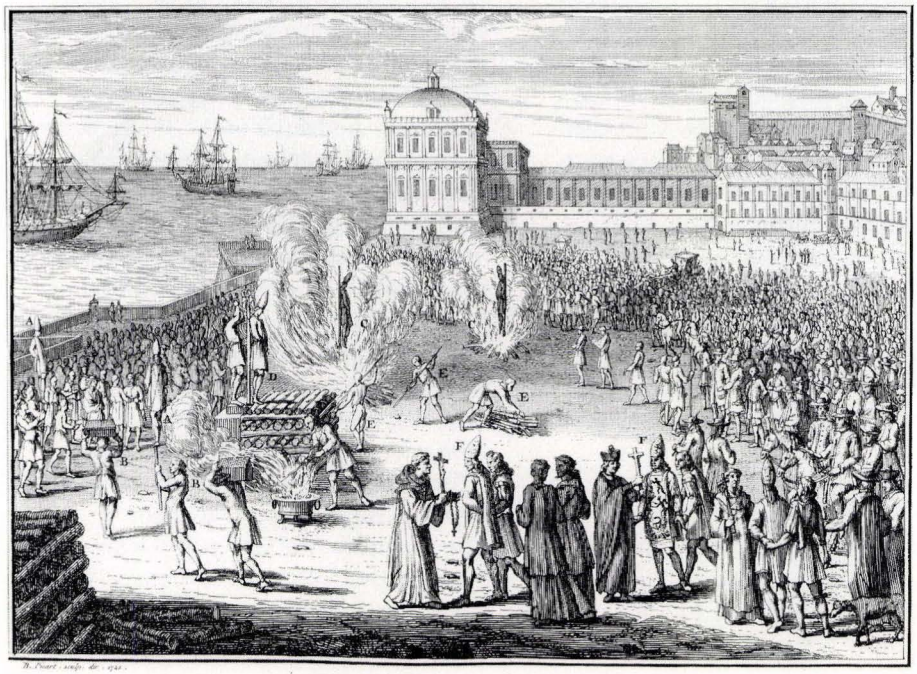
They began by depriving the Jewish community of part of its autonomy. In the past, the king had generally appointed the richest Jew, who was also the royal banker, chief rabbi. He was responsible for the whole Jewish community in Spain and he administered justice according to the Jews' own legal system. Jews could not be tried by non-Jewish courts, but in 1476 the law was changed to make this possible in criminal cases, thus removing one of the mainstays of Jewish autonomy.

In 1478 the two sovereigns received permission from the Pope to appoint inquisitors throughout Castile. In 1480 Jews were forced to live in closed districts. As with the Jewish quarters in Frankfurt and other German cities, the effect was to separate Jews from Christians, in this case New Christians. Jewish influence was greatest in Andalusia in the south, between Granada and Portugal. That was where the Inquisition began work in 1481. On 1 January 1483 all Jews were expelled from Andalusia. Influential New Christians complained to the Pope about their treatment at the hands of the Inquisition and even won their case, but after the appointment as grand inquisitor of Tomas de Torquemada, prior of the Santa Cruz Monastery, the brutality became more rather than less severe. There was little hope left for the New Christians. The Inquisition, which used torture during interrogations, moved northwards, from Toledo to Aragon and Barcelona. In Valencia New Christians tried to flee,

Above: an auto-da-fé in Spain.
Below: an auto-da-fé in Portugal.
(Bernard Picart, 1722. Engravings, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam)



L'AUTO-DA-FÉ, ou l'Acte de Foi.



Suplice des Condamnez.

and about five hundred left Barcelona for France. This greatly displeased the city authorities, who saw their merchant class suddenly disappear and with it much of the city's prosperity.

The Inquisition had been established by the Church to examine the faithful and so could only concern itself with New Christians and not Jews, but the latter were caught up in the trials. It was soon discovered that the New Christians among the accused observed all kinds of Jewish customs. Jewish prayer books were found, both in Hebrew and in the vernacular, Catalan or Aragonese. A translation in the vernacular of the Hebrew Bible was also found. Jewish influence was said to be the reason for the New Christians being bad Christians. It was claimed that Jews could point out New Christians. So the Jews were forced on pain of exile to give evidence in the courts of the Inquisition.

Between 1480 and 1492 thirteen thousand New Christians were interrogated by the Inquisition. A large number became reconciled to the Church, but after savage questioning many thousands were burned alive or subjected to degrading punishments during the 'autos-da-fé' (acts of faith) held throughout the country under the supervision of the secular authorities. Those who came through this alive had their money and property confiscated. Jews and New Christians had become a seriously endangered group.

In this desperate situation – in which moral dilemmas, false accusations with no right of reply, torture, executions and confiscation of property had become normal – many of those persecuted took refuge in believing in the imminent coming of the Messiah. Both Jews and New Christians wrote impassioned messianic works now that it was clear that the attempts made around 1450 to prove the New Christians' innocence had been in vain.

Some New Christians could derive a degree of protection from their economic position or their indispensability to the State. Historical sources show that highly placed New Christians were treated less brutally by the Inquisition than poor craftsmen. Just how ambivalent Ferdinand and Isabella's own attitude was can be seen from the fact that the contracts with the tax collectors, many of them Jews and New Christians, were renewed for four years in 1492. As officials and as middlemen in the economy, many Jews and New Christians were indispensable. Ferdinand and Isabella seem to have drawn a distinction between their usefulness for the economy and their objectionable religion. In the end, however, this distinction could not be sustained. In 1481, at the same time as the Inquisition began its campaign against the New Christians, the military campaign began against Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain. A little over ten years later, on 2 January 1492, Isabella and Ferdinand entered Granada in triumph. Islam had been vanquished. Now it was the turn of the Jews.

On 31 March 1492 the Catholic monarchs signed the Edict of Expulsion (see Appendix B). In their name and that of the grand inquisitor, Tomas de Torquemada,

all Jews were required to leave their territory within three months. For a month Jews with influence at court tried to stop the edict coming into effect. They included Don Abraham Seneor, who was both the religious leader and the rulers' financial backer. But their economic power now counted for less than the religious fanaticism of the Inquisition. From 1 May Jews had three months in which to leave or be converted.

As in 1391, thousands of Jews were converted. For where could they go? Apart from courage, leaving required money and the prospect of being able to start a new life elsewhere. For those who could practise their profession anywhere, leaving need not necessarily mean a substantial loss of income. Using their business connections in other countries, merchants could buy a place on a boat and, after leaving behind most of their capital, begin again with funds they had elsewhere. Doctors, too, could always find work, and scholars could find their way in other Jewish communities. They could leave from Barcelona or Valencia and try to reach Italy or the Ottoman Empire; others had gone before them ever since 1391 and could help. The sultan of the Ottoman Empire invited Jewish merchants to come to his territory under his protection. Those who could afford it did so, but they represented a very small proportion of the total Jewish population.

The nearest countries were Morocco and Portugal. The Jews who had been forced to leave Granada after its reconquest chose Morocco. They spoke Arabic, were familiar with Islam and would feel most at home there. Earlier, when the Jews were driven out of Andalusia, many of them had chosen to go there. According to legend, a crowd of twenty thousand refugees gathered before the gates of Fez. And then there was Portugal. It was nearby, with no Inquisition, and had a Jewish community which was not persecuted and which was structured like that in Spain. The most prominent and wealthiest Jew was appointed chief rabbi by the sovereign. He administered justice in and was responsible for every Jewish community in the country. Many Jews from Aragon and Castile fled to Portugal.

In Spain New Christians resulted from two waves of conversions, in 1391 and 1492. They were given a promise that no inquiries into their beliefs would be held in the coming years. The proceedings of the Inquisition stopped. This was only temporary, however, because there were to be autos-da-fé and burnings at the stake until deep into the 18th century. From 1478 Church and State in Spain were as one in the persecution of all dissenters, most of whom were accused of Judaisation. But those left behind in 1492, such as Isabella's eighty-year-old adviser Don Abraham Seneor and his son-in-law Rav Meir Malamed, were not to know this. The baptism of these leaders came as such a shock to the Jews that a story got about that the queen had forced them to convert by threatening to destroy every Jewish community in the country.

By 31 July 1492 not a single Jewish community was left in Spain. The Jews' property was sold under official supervision, their debts paid, and their social organisations and schools closed down.

On 31 July 1492 the last Jews departed from Aragon and Castile.

New Christians in Portugal, 1492-1992

In the summer of 1492 an estimated one hundred to one hundred and twenty thousand Jews who refused to convert arrived in Portugal. Rich families were allowed to settle there; others were only allowed to pass through the country. In the end, through lack of transport, most were forced to stay in Portugal anyway, where they endured great suffering. Several hundred children were taken away from their parents and sent to the uninhabited island of São Tomé off the African coast, where most of them died.

Under King Manuel, who succeeded João II in 1495, there was at first some respite. But in 1496 he decided to marry the daughter of Isabella and Ferdinand. The bride refused to live in her husband's country while there were still Jews there. However, in Portugal Manuel could not do without financiers and traders as economic middlemen. Instead of expelling them as the Spanish monarchs had done, he devised another way of offering his bride a country without Jews: forced baptism of the entire group. In the process many were physicaly abused, and others were enticed into church under false pretences and then baptised by force. When the last Jew had been baptised, the king promised that for the next twenty years there would be no investigation into their beliefs, or in other words that there would be no Inquisition in Portugal. But he was still afraid that they would flee. For the first ten years, until 1507, none was given permission to leave the country. Meanwhile they continued to live in their old homes, which in Portugal as elsewhere were often in a Jewish quarter. Thus the king could look out from his castle and say, *'That's where my Jews live: it's Friday evening and there's no smoke from those chimneys.'*

There was now a group of believers in Portugal similar to the Judaising New Christians in Spain. Outwardly these people were Catholics but among themselves, at home, they led a Jewish life. Those who finally reached Portugal had faced such hardships and persecution because they were Jewish that they were not about to let that be taken away from them. No distinction was made in Portugal between those who had come from Spain as New Christians and those who came as Jews. All were subjected to baptism, and they were regarded in the same way among themselves and by the government, and given the same treatment. Far more than in Spain, the rich New Christians in Portugal were in a strong economic position. Their indispensability protected the group as a whole from expulsion and gave them respite from inquiries into their beliefs, initially until 1517. In 1512 a new term of twenty years without inquiries into beliefs was agreed with the New Christians. Except for a period of persecution instigated by the Dominicans in Lisbon in 1506 and a second, less virulent, outburst of anti-New Christian feeling in 1515, they led a peaceful life in Portugal.

An account by the Jewish adventurer David Reubeni, who was sent surprisingly

enough by the Pope to King João III of Portugal, reveals how far they were able to live as Jews. In 1525 Reubeni spent a year in Portugal with his Jewish servants and was received by the New Christians as their leader. They accorded him the kind of honours that were normally reserved for the Portuguese king. One of the consequences of Reubeni's arrival was that the New Christian Diogo Pires circumcised himself and became Solomon Molcho. He was to be renowned beyond Portugal as a kabbalist and messianic visionary. Four years after leaving Lisbon, Molcho was able to publish an authoritative work in Hebrew on the Kabbalah, which suggests that the first generation in Portugal after 1497 could still get a good Jewish education.

But even here the clouds of persecution finally gathered. King Manuel died in 1521. His son João III was much less tolerant and the Inquisition was introduced after all



King João III of Portugal. (Anonymous, undated. Engraving, Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon)

during his reign in 1536. For a while the New Christians were able to exploit their economic importance and their thorough knowledge of the political relations between Church, State and Pope; they even sent a representative to the papal court to present their case. In this way they were able to delay the start of the Inquisition's work for a few years. But in the end the fear of heresy prevailed over political and socioeconomic interests. In 1540 the first auto-da-fé took place in Lisbon.

A notable aspect of the later history of the New Christians in Portugal is that they resisted the Inquisition for much longer and more stubbornly than their Spanish co-religionists. In Portugal Jews and New Christians could not be played off against each other. Together they formed a close-knit group. The 'Homen de Naçao', the Men of the Nation, as the New Christians called themselves, felt a bond not only with each other but with other New Christians outside Portugal, even when under pressure from the Inquisition.

Of course, attempts were made to leave. In 1550 a group of Portuguese merchants in Bayonne asked the French king for permission to settle there. They founded a New Christian community, again in a country beyond the reach of the Inquisition. Others fled to Morocco, where they were absorbed into existing Jewish communities. The same happened in the Ottoman Empire and in Ferrara in Italy. But many remained in Portugal. In 1580 the country was annexed by Spain. Fearing the Inquisition, the New Christians left Lisbon. Paradoxically, they went to Spain, hoping that they and their Jewish background would not be known there. Their arrival led to a new wave of Judaisation among the New Christians. Most of the accused in the scores of trials held by the Spanish Inquisition at the beginning of the 17th century came from Portugal.

It was the Homen de Naçao who kept alive the Jewish background of the New Christian group in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, both in Spain and Portugal and in their colonies in South America and Asia.

How are we to assess the Jewishness of the New Christians? This question came up in 17th-century Amsterdam and was also to preoccupy the rulers of Venice in the late 16th century, since many Sephardi Jews had settled there. Jews in Amsterdam posed this question because of a need to define their own group; the Venetian authorities were more concerned with carefully separating Christians and Jews to prevent the Church and the Inquisition from interfering. Nowadays Jews are concerned with this point because it is a historical reflection of the question of their own Jewish identity. Perhaps it can best be answered by looking at how these New Christians defined themselves as Jewish individuals, as Jews do today.

In the mountain village of Belmonte in the Tras-os-Montes region of northern Portugal there is today a small group who call themselves 'Jews' and are regarded as such by outsiders. Nonetheless, they go to church. But they also celebrate a corrupt form of Pesach or Passover handed down orally over four centuries. This is done in great secrecy because their pursuer during

the exodus from Egypt, remembered at Pesach, is the Inquisition. They are the last descendants of the New Christians and now that they can put aside their fears they are being taken back into the Naçao, the Jewish People.

Each New Christian, from the first to the people of Tras-os-Montes, has had to decide as an individual whether his Jewish identity was important and how it should be expressed in view of his personal socio-economic, religious and political situation. It is not up to us to make judgements about the intensity of personal experience, neither in the case of our contemporaries nor in that of historical figures.

We can do no more than record that, Jewish or non-Jewish, the New Christians of Portugal, some of whom had fled from Spain in 1391 and 1492, gave the Sephardi tradition a place in Western Europe and the New World, and did so despite all the problems and persecutions. From the point of view of Jewish history, they form the essential link in an almost broken chain. The terms 'marran', 'pig' and 'crypto-Jew', the last deriving from the Inquisition, do not apply to them. They were and are the Homen de Naçao.

Jews in Amsterdam, 1585-1992

We know too little about most of the New Christians who left the Iberian peninsula between 1536 and the end of the 16th century to determine exactly where they went. Many embarked on long journeys. The Nassi family, for example, went to London and Venice before ending up in Istanbul.

The names of the New Christians in Bayonne are known from 1550, but there is much less information about the large group who went to Antwerp. It is clear that towards the end of the 16th century their attempts to resettle as Jews were beginning to be successful. Again because of the economic benefits expected, the New Christians were given permission to settle as Jews in Venice and Split in 1589, and in Livorno in 1593. They began trading with the Ottoman Empire. In Western Europe one of the places where New Christians settled was Amsterdam, which in the late 16th century was a young city with great economic potential. After 1585 it attracted hundreds of thousands of immigrants in only a few decades.

On 31 March 1597 Manuel Rodrigues Vega became the first Portuguese to secure 'poorterschap' of Amsterdam, which meant that he became a burgher or citizen. When he was registered in the 'poorters-boek', a note was added to the effect that the city authorities expected him to live as a good Christian. Apparently this unusual addition was required in this case. Vega belonged to a family of New Christians; he had relatives in Lisbon, Rouen, London, Antwerp and Brazil among other places. The remark accompanying his registration as a citizen shows that Vega, his wife and eight children did not conceal their Jewish background and practised their faith. Did such behaviour create problems for him and the other Portuguese merchants in Amsterdam?

Since 1578 Amsterdam had been a Protestant city on the side of the young Dutch

Republic in its struggle against the king of Spain. Unlike other European countries involved in religious wars, the Republic never imposed a religion on its citizens. The Union of Utrecht, which was drawn up in 1578 and signed the next year, is the first official document in Western history to guarantee freedom of conscience. In the Republic everyone was free to practise his own religion, although only members of the official Reformed Church could hold public office. After 1578, however, more than half the city's population belonged to churches other than the official one. Most of the citizens had remained Catholic, but there were also large numbers of Lutherans, Baptists and other dissenters. Admitting one more religious group ought not to have been a problem, except that in this case the group was not Christian. That changed matters.

For the time being nothing happened. The Portuguese held religious gatherings in private houses, arranging for the rabbi Uri ha-Levie to come from Emden, and ensured that there was kosher meat. But the slowly growing community increasingly felt the need to express their Jewishness, which was not easy while a group of orthodox Calvinists was in power in Amsterdam. The Portuguese Jews now tried to use their economic resources to secure rights in other cities, a tactic which had often succeeded elsewhere. In Portugal they had managed to postpone the coming of the Inquisition for years by paying large sums of money to the Pope and other church dignitaries. After the Inquisition was introduced, the New Christians paid huge ransoms for several years to avoid persecution. In Venice in 1589 they were given permission to settle in the city because they had a plan for safeguarding trade through the Adriatic Sea. In 1590 they were invited to move to Livorno because of their skills in trade and business, but they did not go until three years later, when they had been granted complete freedom to live there as Jews. So the Portuguese merchants, who were all New Christians, were very familiar with the technique of deploying their economic resources.

The Portuguese asked for permission to settle in Alkmaar in 1604, in Haarlem in 1605 and in Rotterdam in 1610. Permission was always given, but Amsterdam was such an important centre of trade that they decided to stay there after all. Amsterdam had received no request and so did not have to pronounce on the question of admitting the Jews. This could not be avoided, however, when in 1614 it became known that three Christians in Hoorn had converted to Judaism. That was too much for the authorities in Amsterdam and they were forced to determine their standpoint on the presence of the Jews.

In 1616 the city passed a statute which dealt with the classic question of the separation of Jews and Christians. Two important rules were laid down: the Jews must make no converts and there were to be no sexual relations between Jews and Christians. The second point reflected the fact that there was a surplus of men in the Jewish community and that Jewish families often had Christian servant girls. The city fathers did not want to have to determine the religion of any children born as a result

of such relations. In 1616, moreover, the States of Holland, of which Amsterdam was a member, decided to examine the possibility of having one set of rules on Jews for the whole province. The liberal Hugo Grotius, Pensionary of Rotterdam, and the orthodox Adriaan Pauw, Pensionary of Amsterdam, were both asked to produce drafts. In this instance, apart from being a religious issue, the separation of Jews and Christians played a part in protecting the State, since Church and State were one. Hugo Grotius, whose proposal has been preserved, argued that since Jews were people they must have a place to live. They should be admitted not for economic benefits but *'for the love of God'*. The States of Holland finally determined in 1619 that the cities should decide for themselves whether or not they would admit Jews, but in any case they were not to require them to wear any visible mark. The cities could, however, insist that the Jews live in a separate quarter, although this never in fact happened. In Holland and in Amsterdam this was as far as separation went. Jews were people like the rest of the population and were free to live in the Republic without distinguishing marks like the yellow hat in Venice, without a closed ghetto as in Frankfurt and without a tax on Jews as in Furth as long as they did not convert Christians, have children of mixed religion or endanger the security of the State.

The leaders of the Jewish community incorporated these principles in their own regulations. In 1639, when after five years of negotiations the three existing congregations merged into one, the following articles were agreed: No. 38, stating that Jews might not discuss the faith with non-Jews with the aim of converting them, and No. 39, stating that no one might be circumcised without the permission of the leaders of the congregation. This relates to circumcision as an act sealing the conversion to Judaism of adults. The regulations also stated that only Portuguese and Spanish might be circumcised, another restriction resulting from the Amsterdam principles.
These regulations were accepted by all three congregations in 1639, which suggests that they already existed before then.

By about 1616 the basis for an organised Jewish congregation in Amsterdam was clearly present. The first congregation, called according to legend Beth Jacob (House of Jacob), had been founded in the first decade of the 17th century, and a prayer book of 1612 bears the symbol of a second, Neve Shalom (Home of Peace). After a dispute in Beth Jacob, Beth Israel (House of Israel) was founded in 1618 as a breakaway group. These three small congregations probably arose because of religious differences or family ties.

Unfamiliar with the organisation of a Jewish congregation, since most members came from a New Christian background, they relied partly on what they could remember and partly on what they learned through their connections in Venice.
The Jewish congregations in Amsterdam were somewhere in between religious organisations and the kind of trade missions for foreign merchants which existed all over the world. All power was

in the hands of the members of the administration, the 'mahamad'. Everything that happened in the congregation was decided by them and, like their counterparts in Venice, they had the power to pronounce excommunication, the 'cherem'. In other places excommunication was the prerogative of a rabbinic court, but in Amsterdam the rabbinate was subordinate to the administration and had no powers of decision except in strictly religious matters.

The congregations had various societies for shared tasks. Bikur Cholim (Visiting the Sick) took care of the sick and the dead; initially the cemetery was in Groet beyond Alkmaar but from 1614 there was one in Ouderkerk, much closer to the city. In 1615 the Santa Companhia de Dotar Orfas e Donzellas was founded. Modelled on a Venetian example, it provided dowries for poor and ophaned young girls. From 1616 onwards the Talmud Tora society existed to provide education in addition to the private teaching which the children of wealthier parents received. Finally, there were special funds administered by the mahamad: Terra Santa for the support of Sephardi communities in the Holy Land, and Cautivos for the ransoming of prisoners, particularly in Muslim countries.

The congregation's activities were paid for by two levies. The first, the 'imposta', was a tax on imports and exports and made sense only in a congregation in which most of the members were engaged in trade. The administrators of the imposta supervised all the congregation's social work. The second was the 'finta', a wealth tax, also borrowed from Venice.

Like all the other dissenting religious groups in Amsterdam, the Jews were obliged to care for their own poor and this led to an increasing need for the three congregations to cooperate, even though they already collaborated in the various societies. Since some congregations had more poor than others, the cost of supporting them was not shared equally. In 1639 the congregations were united under the name Talmud Tora, chosen as a gesture towards the congregation in Venice which had served as their example.

Who were the members of these three congregations, later to be united in one? Shipping contracts and other documents show that most of the Portuguese Jews did indeed come to Amsterdam from Portugal or places with colonial or trading links to her. Legend had it that the 'Portuguese' Jews did not dare to call themselves 'Spanish' because the Republic was at war with Spain at the time of their arrival, but this tale has now been conclusively refuted. It is also certain that most of those who came were New Christians. The question of what came first and what played the greater role – the pursuit of new profits or the need to be able to live as Jews – will always be impossible to answer.

In the late 16th and early 17th century traders did not yet take their goods to a single fixed market; they disposed of them gradually at the places lying along a trade route. Profits were made because prices varied along the route. Portugal, with its colonies in Brazil and India, had a number of products that it sold in northern Europe along the route between Lisbon and

Antwerp, the principal ones being sugar, tobacco, Brazilian woods used in dyeing and diamonds. In exchange, the traders received grain. Another important aspect of trade at this time was that the merchant no longer travelled with his goods, as he had in the Middle Ages; instead, the trading house had agents at different places along the route. Since they had to be trustworthy, these agents were often sons, brothers or cousins.

In 1585 the port of Antwerp was blockaded by the rebels in the Northern Netherlands. The New Christian merchants were forced to find another destination for their trade route. After trying London and Hamburg, they chose Amsterdam. This created the Brazil-Lisbon-Amsterdam trading triangle. En route, in Bordeaux, Nantes, Rouen and Antwerp, there were agents to help solve problems.

The first question that arises is how the New Christians in Amsterdam who had now returned to Judaism could do business without problems with the New Christians in Lisbon. In the first place the Jews in Amsterdam used two names. They kept their Portuguese names and only used their Jewish names in the synagogue. Thus the later resident of the king of Portugal was known in public life as Jeronimo Nunes da Costa, but in the synagogue as Mozes Curiel. As a result, the officials in Lisbon could not tell from the shipping documents that Jews were involved.

A second tactic was that certain families increasingly intermarried. This improved their safety because they knew about and accepted each other's Jewishness, but also kept the wealth in the family. There were marriages between the Vega and Sanchez Abaz families, between the Suassos and the Del Sottos then the De Pintos, and between Nunes da Costa and Abaz. From religious, economic and social motives clans were formed within the New Christian world, and particularly the Portuguese community in Amsterdam.

Lastly, the third and perhaps the most important factor was that Portugal could not do without its foreign contacts. From 1581 to 1640 it had been part of Spain and the languages, cultures and economies of the two countries had been mixed. After 1640 Portugal was once more independent and wanted to follow its own course, and Jews as agents in Amsterdam were preferred to help from Spain.

The attitude of the Amsterdam Jews to Spain also changed significantly in the course of the 17th century. In 1643 Philip III's prime minister, Conde Ducque d'Olivares, lost his powerful position. He had protected many New Christians because he recognised their economic value to Spain. They now decided to leave the country. Immigrants came to Amsterdam from Antwerp, which was under Spanish rule, and from the community of New Christians in Spain. They brought with them wealth and an aristocratic way of life. The relationship with Spain became closer after 1672 when, as part of the European policy of Stadholder William III, the Republic became an ally of Spain, having been its enemy up to 1648. And so it was that both the agent of the king of Spain and the agent of the king of Portugal in Amsterdam were members of the



A sugar factory on a sugar plantation in Brazil.
(Frans Post, c. 1650. Canvas, 71.5 x 91.5 cm, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam)

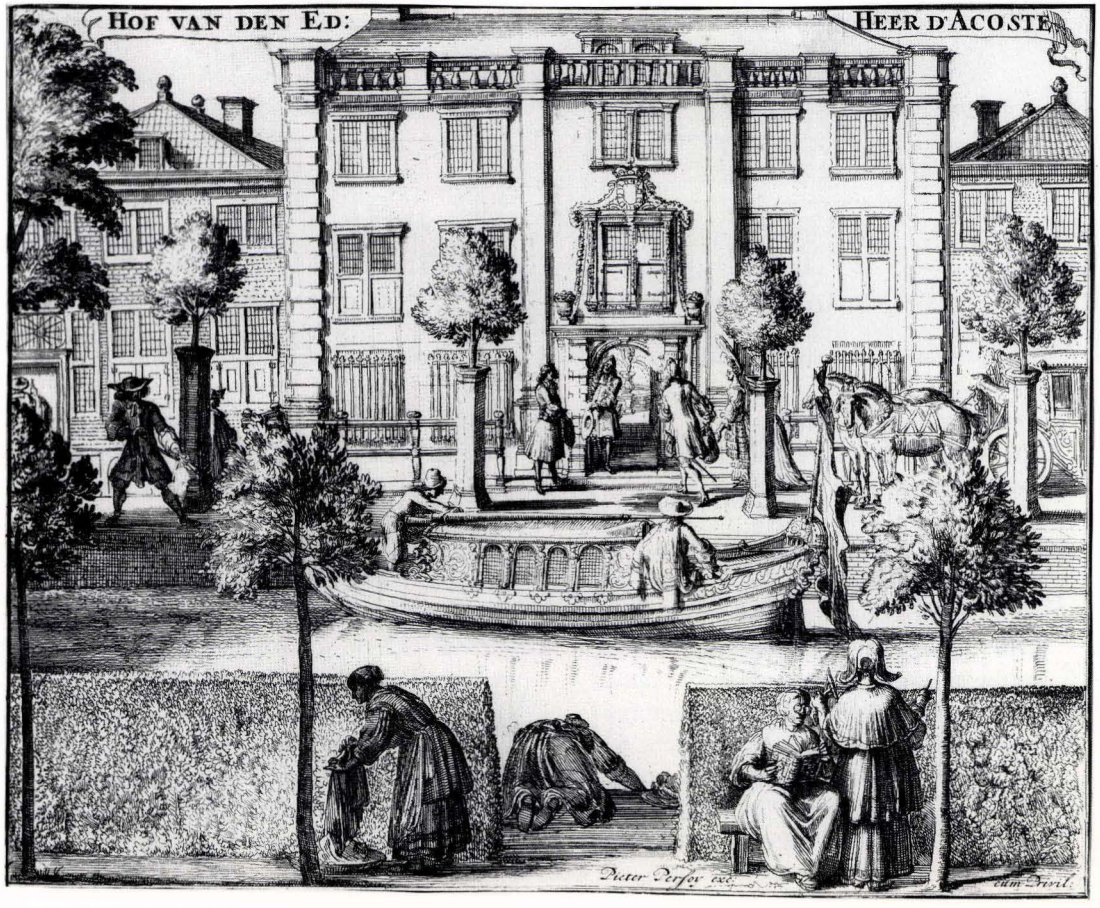
Portuguese congregation. Thus towards the end of the 17th century the ties with Portugal and Spain became stronger rather than weaker.

To this day the customs of the congregation reflect its Iberian origins. The prayer for the royal house is still said in Portuguese. All announcements in the synagogue are made in the same language. Until about 1850 the sermons were written in Portuguese, as were many documents to do with day-to-day matters. The Portuguese used in the Netherlands was influenced first by Spanish, then after 1640 by the French of the Southern Netherlands and lastly by Dutch. Spanish was used for prayer books and for Bible translations, commentaries and apologetics. It was also the language of culture, the language in which secular literature was written and plays were acted. These literary activities were one of the ways in which the congregation resembled a trade mission, where merchants would entertain each other with literature in their native language. Two Spanish poetry circles flourished, the Academia de los Sitibundos (Academy of the Thirsty) and the

Academia de los Floridos (Academy of the Flowering).

The best known poet in the community was Miguel de Barrios, a captain in the Spanish army, who came to Amsterdam in 1652 and was known as Daniel Levi de Barrios in the synagogue. He came up against another facet of the powers of the mahamad. It had the right of censorship, and books could be printed only after it gave permission. At first this was refused in the case of De Barrios' fashionably baroque poetry larded with references to classical mythology. He went to Brussels and had his poems printed there. On his return to Amsterdam he had to stand at the 'tebah', the rostrum used for readings from the Torah, and express his remorse over his journey to the land of 'idolatria'.

From the beginning the Jewish congregation in Amsterdam was aware of its role as a model for the other New Christian



The home of Jeronimo Nunes da Costa, alias Mozes Curiel, on Joden Herengracht – now Nieuwe Herengracht, no. 49. Mozes Curiel was agent for the king of Portugal in Amsterdam. (Romeyn de Hooghe, c. 1700. Etching, Municipal Archives, Amsterdam)

congregations. It was not for nothing that the regulations of the Dotar society stated that the dowries were intended for *'orphans and poor girls of the Portuguese and Castilian Nation living between St. Jean de Luz and Danzig, whether in France, Flanders, England or Germany'*. They had to convert to Judaism to obtain their dowry and could only collect it in Amsterdam. Relatives of the members of the society, who had all donated twenty Flemish pounds, took precedence – here too the clan was important.

But just as much as the rules of such societies, the writings produced within the community reflect the special needs of the New Christians. Many of the newcomers were concerned about whether they had made the right choice and what their place should be as Jews. Consequently, there are more educational books in Spanish about the Jewish tradition and dogmatic works on the hereafter, messianism and rationalism than traditional Halachic works. And here too the mahamad had the power of censorship. The doctrines of the circle around Dr. De Prado, to which Spinoza belonged, circulated in manuscript. They provided a rational basis for the concept of God and could easily lead to doubt. Such ideas were completely unacceptable to the leaders of this congregation of novices in the faith. There must be no doubting the authority of God. Spinoza knew the risks he was taking with his writings: censorship or expulsion from the community. But he persisted with his rationalist ideas and when he was finally expelled he in turn broke all his ties with the Jewish community. He thus became the first Jew to live outside that community without being baptised, the first secular Jew, as we would now say. In the tolerant climate of Holland he immediately found a job and became a Hebrew teacher at a Latin school in the city. Most of his writings were not published until after his death. In the case of other Jewish authors certain of their works are known only in manuscript: the mahamad would have prevented their publication.

The last quarter of the 17th century was the heyday of the Portuguese community. There were probably about 2300 Sephardi Jews living in Amsterdam at this time. The community was rich and had considerable influence on the Jewish communities since established in Hamburg, London, Curaçao and Surinam, and on the New Christian groups in France. In 1675, on the shabbath after the fast day for the destruction of the Temple, Shabbath Nachamu, the building was opened that was to become the symbol of the golden age, the Esnoga. To mark the opening, a unique series of prints was produced by the artist Romeyn de Hooghe, who was a member of Stadholder William III's circle. Emanuel de Witte painted the interior. The Suassos danced at the balls of Stadholder-King William III and in 1678 the members of the mahamad were in church for the funeral of the naval hero Admiral De Ruyter.

But change was in the air. Trade through the Brazil-Lisbon-Amsterdam triangle had been seriously affected when Portuguese settlers recaptured Brazil from



Portrait of Menasseh ben Israel who came to Amsterdam from Lisbon in 1613 or 1614 and later became the first Jewish book printer and an important rabbi.
(Rembrandt van Rijn, 1636. Etching, Rembrandt House, Amsterdam)

the Dutch in 1654. In these times of war, contacts with the Southern Netherlands and Spain offered spectacular trading opportunities but little continuity. London and Curaçao overtook Amsterdam in this field. Then the economic decline in the 18th century affected the entire Dutch Republic and came as a heavy blow to Amsterdam. The great days of Sephardi trade were gone for good, as was the power it had brought; the combination of trade mission and Jewish congregation became a thing of the past. Eighty-five per cent of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam were on poor relief, the highest proportion in the city. Not many new immigrants arrived from Portugal or Spain.
The Portuguese language continued to be used until well into the first half of the 19th century, but the last prayer book in Spanish was printed in 1732.

It is as if the congregation were aware of this process and had stopped time in order to hold on to the period of greatness, vitality and debate. Even now the rabbi and cantor still wear their official robes dating from the second half of the 18th century. As mentioned, the prayer for the royal house is still spoken in the language of trade, so closely associated with the golden age in the 17th century.

Almost three hundred years have passed since the Portuguese community was in its heyday. For three centuries the descendants of the Portuguese traders and the diplomats and bankers with their aspirations towards an aristocratic way of life have cared for and maintained their synagogue, the Esnoga. It is a small community which again came close to annihilation in the Second World War and which feels a duty to let the glorious past continue to be part of our culture. We owe them our thanks.

The history of a small group of Portuguese New Christians or Dutch Jews forms a unique chapter in Jewish history

and gives the Netherlands a special place in it. At a time when in Western Europe Jews lived in ghettos, in Eastern Europe in closed communities and in Muslim countries in separate quarters, Amsterdam neither forced them to live in particular areas nor limited the number admitted. At a time when Jews communicated in Yiddish or Ladino, the Portuguese in Amsterdam spoke Portuguese and Spanish, and French after the influx from the Southern Netherlands after 1640. Many knew Dutch. While elsewhere, of necessity, the Jews often shut themselves off from the outside world, the Portuguese continued to be part not only of the Jewish community but of Dutch society and Iberian culture. They carried on the multi-cultural tradition of Sephardi Spain. Within limits agreed between themselves and Amsterdam, on a basis of economic equality, they enjoyed the kind of human equality that had existed in Spain in the 10th century, the Golden Age. Like their forefathers before them in Spain, in Amsterdam they were free to live as true Jews from Sepharad, as true Sephardis.

A 'miniature sanctuary'

The history and function of the synagogue

Edward van Voolen

The synagogue has three main functions within Jewish communal life: it is a house of assembly ('beth hakeneseth'), a study centre ('beth hamidrash') and a place of worship ('beth hatephillah'). The word 'synagogue' stems from the Greek for 'assembly' and although designed as a religious building its importance is as a place where Jews can be together as a group.

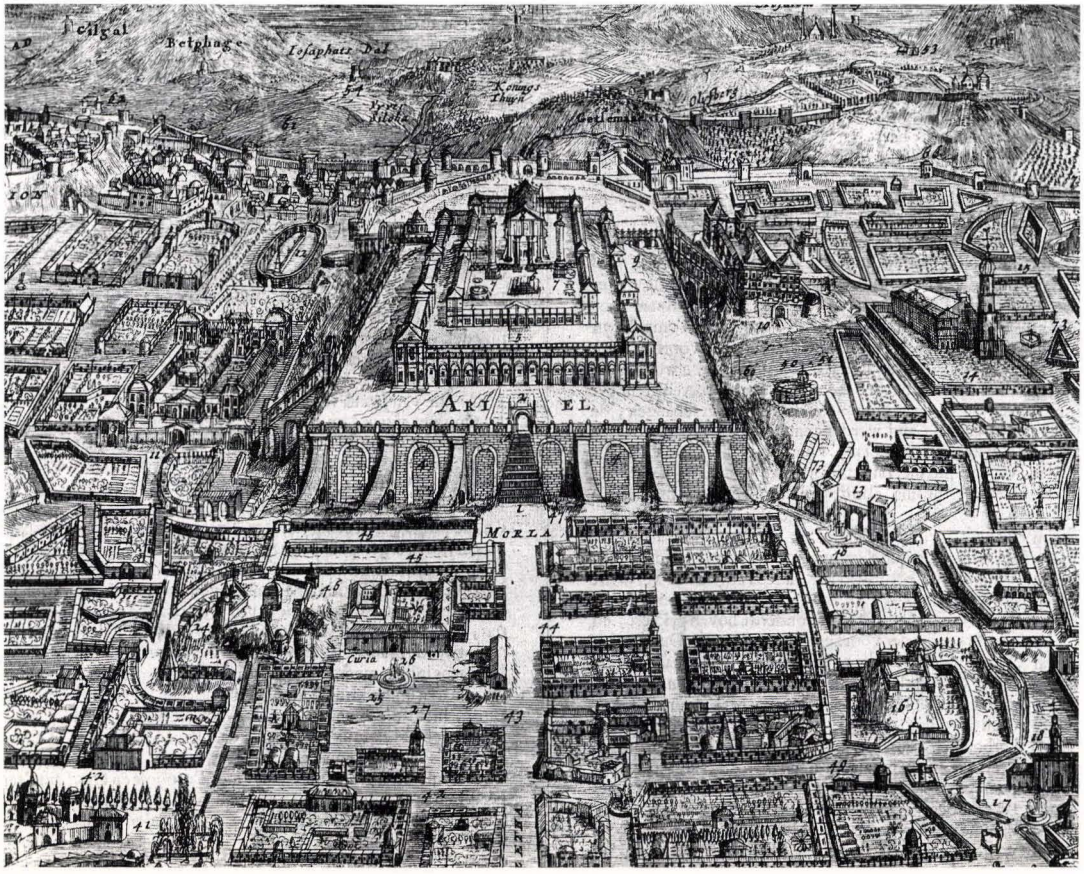
The synagogue is not mentioned in the Tanach – the Old Testament. The central edifice in the Bible is the Temple – built by Solomon in the 10th century BCE, destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, then again rebuilt and redecorated, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The 'Cohanim' performed the priestly rites in the Temple assisted by the 'Levites'. The services revolved around two daily sacrifices – and more on festivals. Additional sacrifices were also made on behalf of private individuals.

We do not know for certain when the synagogue as an institution was first introduced. It has been suggested that its origins lie in the Babylonian Exile (586-533 BCE), when Jews began searching for an alternative to the sacrificial rites of the despoiled Temple. However, no such buildings of this period have survived. With the return of the exiles the Temple was rebuilt and the sacrifices restored. Alternatively, the origins of the synagogue may lie elsewhere in the diaspora. One possibility is Egypt, where Jewish houses of worship are mentioned in inscriptions of the 3rd and 2nd century BCE. Other scholars argue that the first synagogues appeared with the rise of rabbinical authority in the 2nd century CE. The rabbis laid more stress on prayer in addition to and even instead of the Temple sacrifice. Groups of Jews assembled for prayers, to read from the Torah and to explain the text at the times set aside for the Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem. Perhaps these gatherings were the prototypes for the later synagogues.

For Jews the study of biblical and rabbinical texts has always remained an essential aspect of Jewish life – an activity often centred on the synagogue and the building's study rooms. Since the destruction of the Second Temple and the dispersion of Jews throughout the world,

wherever Jews have found themselves they have based their lives on Tanach and the established interpretations within the originally oral tradition. This tradition was committed to writing in the 2nd century CE in the Mishnah, a six-part work containing all the laws pertaining to agriculture, shabbath and festivals, marriage, criminal justice and civil administration, the Temple service and the dietary and purity laws. Intricate discussions on the Mishnah followed and by the 6th century CE this had led to the compilation of the Talmud. The constantly changing circumstances faced by Jews in the diaspora meant that Jews had to adapt to their surroundings and rabbis have continued to add to this tradition with new judgments to this day.

A Jew is required both to pray and to study. Thus quotations from the Mishnah, the Talmud and later rabbinic literature are included in the prayerbook, and in the service quotations from the Bible are introduced and concluded with blessings and praise. On special occasions the Torah



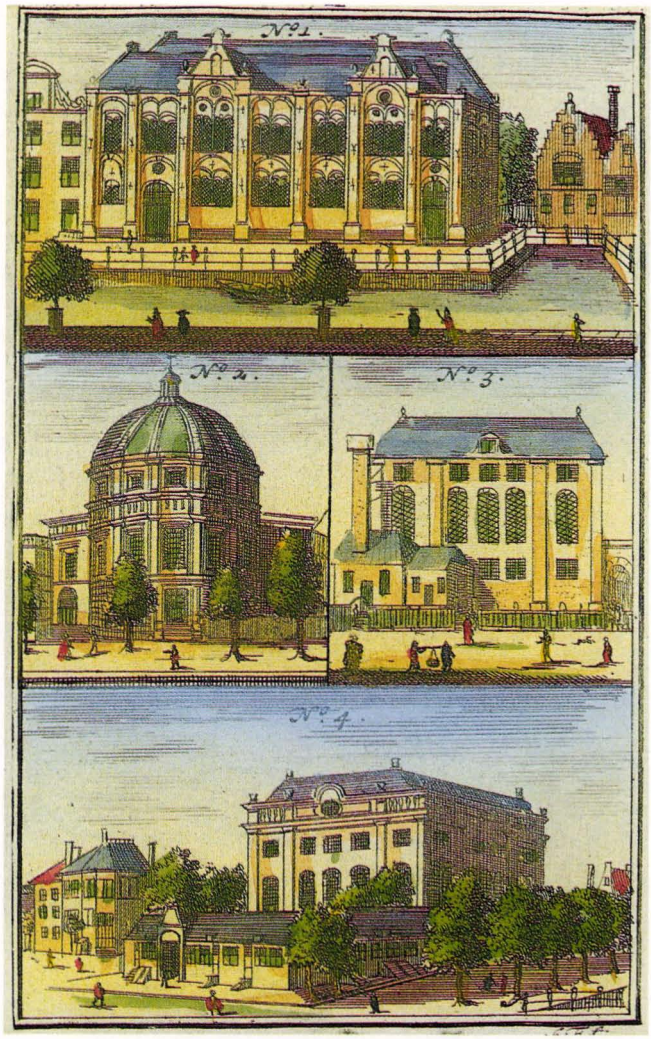
An imaginary view of Solomon's Temple.
(Anonymous, early 18th century. Etching, Israel Museum, Jerusalem [Detail])

reading is followed by a sermon discussing the contents of the Torah portion. Services are also regularly preceded or followed by study groups. Thus it is hardly surprising that the synagogue became known as the 'schola' or 'scola' in medieval Europe, this later became 'scuola' in Italy and 'Schule' in Germany, whence the Yiddish 'shul', now a generally used term for synagogue.

Whatever name we give it, it is the function of the synagogue rather than the form which is central: after all, a congregation can meet in almost any form of building. Indeed, synagogues have always been remarkably similar to other contemporary – religious and secular – centres throughout the ages. Four synagogues with classical architectural features have been discovered dating, according to most scholars, to before the destruction of the Second Temple. These are the synagogues found at Gamla, Massada and Herodium in Israel and on the Greek island of Delos. Elongated, with seats along the walls and in some cases with an apse, they were built facing Jerusalem and have been identified by narrative sources as well as inscriptions. In later buildings it is often the characteristic Jewish decorations that reveal the building's function as a synagogue. Archaeological finds in Israel and elsewhere have shown the enormous variety of architectural styles – there has never been one single line of development. Various synagogues of between the 3rd and 7th centuries discovered in Israel have floors with figurative mosaics. An interesting synagogue was the building found at Dura Europos on the Euphrates in present-day Syria (c. 244-245 CE), with its unique murals depicting Jewish scenes. These synagogues show that the biblical prohibition against images was treated flexibly during this period, although reliefs and sculpture were forbidden.

The synagogues of Europe since the Middle Ages also betray the influence of surrounding architectural styles. There are European synagogues in all architectural forms – with Gothic spires, classical or Baroque pillars, and 19th-century neo-Gothic and modern functionalist buildings. Synagogues have been built emulating medieval chapels, mosques, Italian Baroque halls, Protestant churches and modern utilitarian buildings. At most the design might be simpler – dictated by the community's economic limitations or restrictions imposed by the local Christian authorities. Stylistic adaptations are also evident in the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam. The medieval Synagogues of the Iberian peninsula – the original home of the Sephardi Jews – suggest no architectural styles that may have served as a direct example for the Esnoga.

The synagogue service is governed by a section of the laws pertaining to daily life and religious observance – indeed, the entire life of a Jew is a form of observance. The role of the synagogue is reflected in the architecture of the building. Often the actual synagogue is part of a larger complex involving classrooms and study rooms, a library, administrative offices and dwellings. In addition, the requirement that married women immerse themselves in clear water after menstruation means that



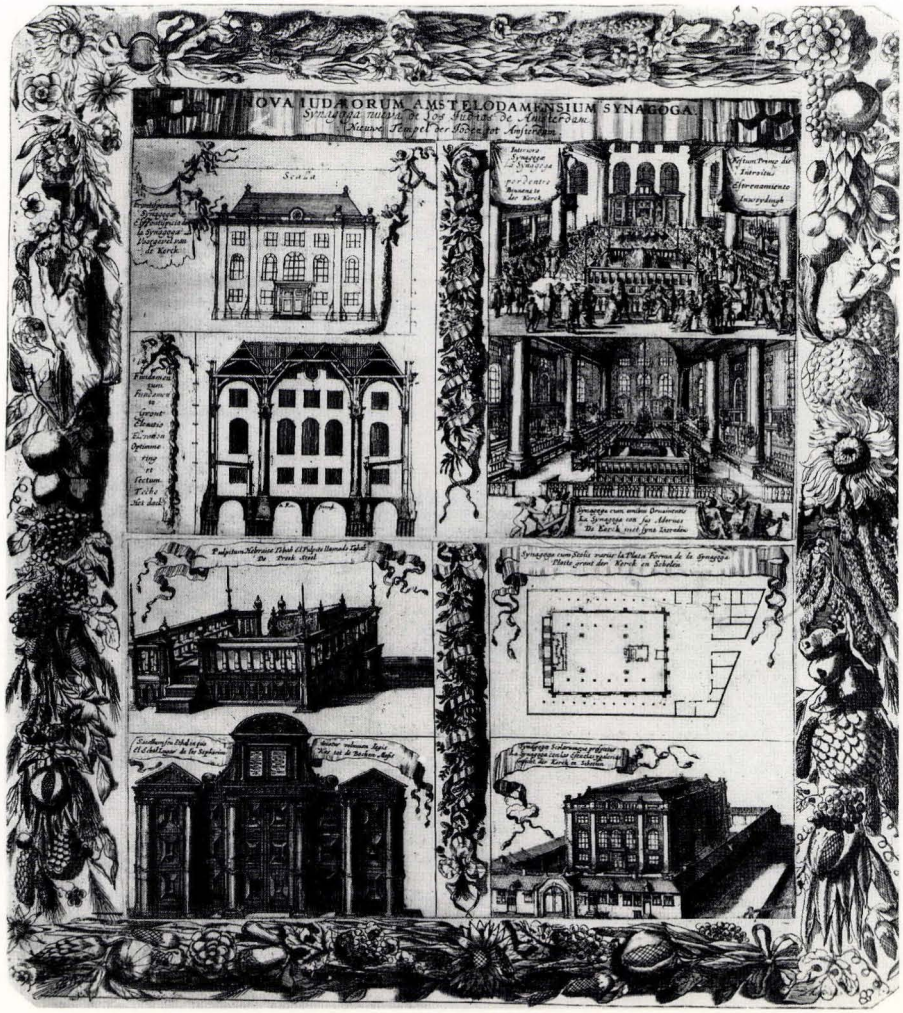
Two churches and two synagogues built in Amsterdam in the 17th century.
No. 1: the Old Lutheran Church (1633)
No. 2: the Round Lutheran Church (1671)
No. 3: the Great Synagogue (1671)
No. 4: the Portuguese Synagogue (1675)
(J. Marshoorn (?), 1741. Coloured etching, Cohen Paraira collection)

a 'mikveh' (ritual bath) is also necessary.

The plan of a synagogue should emphasise the importance of study – whether the synagogue is simply a room in a house or part of a large complex. A portion of the Torah is read from the parchment scroll on shabbath morning and afternoon, on Monday and Thursday mornings and on festivals. Most of the seats in the synagogue face the lectern on the 'bimah', or podium in the middle where the prayers are recited and the Torah is read. In the synagogues of Sephardi Jews in Holland and in places

where synagogue architecture was influenced by Dutch Sephardi traditions, i.e., in London, Curaçao and New York, the reading desk, known here as the 'tebah', was placed somewhat to the back. The Torah reading from the tebah is preceded and followed by a formal procession carrying the scrolls through the synagogue. The second focal point and the most important part of the synagogue is the 'hechal' or 'aron', an in-built or free-standing Ark containing the Torah scrolls. The Ark faces Jerusalem, and is built into or in front of the eastern wall. Thus the prayers are also said facing Jerusalem.

The rabbis refer to the synagogue as a 'miniature sanctuary' (based on Ezekiel 11.16) – representing the Temple. By facing



Etching with various views of the Esnoga.
From left, above: the façade, a cross-section, the tebah, the hechal, a birds-eye view of the complex, the ground plan, the interior and an illustration of the festive inauguration of 1675 (cf. p. 47).
(Romeyn de Hooghe, 1675 or later. Etching, Municipal Archives, Amsterdam)

Jerusalem the synagogue preserves the memory of the Temple. Moreover, the podium for the Torah reading is a reminder of the altar for the original burnt offerings. The names of the Ark housing the Torah scrolls, 'hechal' (sanctuary) among Sephardis and 'aron' (Ark) among Ashkenazis, also refer to the Temple, as do the 'ner tamid' (the eternal flame) above the Ark and the 'parochet' (screen curtain). Dutch Sephardi synagogues do not generally use screens, except on the fast of the 9th of Ab, in remembrance of the destruction of the Temple.

As in the Temple, men and women are strictly separated. A separate entrance leads to the women's section in the gallery or another part of the synagogue – known as the 'ezrat nashim' (women's section) just as it was in the Temple.

The sacrificial rite is symbolised in the synagogue service by the reading of biblical and post-biblical texts – often concerning the rituals of the Temple. The times of the daily prayers – morning, noon and evening – correspond to the times of the original Temple sacrifices. Prayers are read by all the worshippers while the 'chazan' leads the service, in Sephardi synagogues from the tebah and in Ashkenazi synagogues from the 'amud', a lectern in front of the Ark. The Cohanim still play a certain role in the synagogue service: the recitation of the priestly blessing (Numbers 6.24-26). This is done after they have washed their hands, aided by a Levite. Cohanim and Levites are also the first to be 'called up' to take part in the Torah reading from the tebah. The rabbi has only a limited role in the service: his main function is to administer the religious affairs of the community. However, the rabbi does have a place of honour in the synagogue and on important occasions he delivers a sermon.

The main sections of the service can only take place if a 'minyan' is present – a quorum of ten men above the age of thirteen. This is the minimum number required for a congregation. This regulation, and indeed the fact that most prayers are phrased in the plural, reflect the communal aspect of prayer and study in the synagogue. Here too, the synagogue, the 'miniature sanctuary', is a reflection of the original sanctuary – the Temple.

A southwest view of the Esnoga with the Houtgracht bridge in the foreground.
(Anonymous, early 18th century. Panel, 37.5 x 48.5 cm, Portuguese Congregation, Amsterdam)



A jewel in the city

The architectural history of the Portuguese-Jewish Synagogue

David P. Cohen Paraira

The first houses of prayer

'Practised religion in the Jewish manner in this city'

The Sephardis who came from Spain and Portugal to Amsterdam as New Christians around 1600 settled on Vlooyenburg, an island in the River Amstel about where the Waterlooplein now is. When the city expanded at the end of the 16th century, Vlooyenburg had been brought within its walls.

In 1602-1603 Sephardi Jews held religious gatherings in a house opposite the Montelbaan Tower. This was the home of Rabbi Uri ha-Levie. These gatherings aroused the suspicions of those living nearby and they alerted the sheriff. On Yom Kippur in the year 5363, or 15 September 1602, the sheriff raided the house and found the rabbi and a number of Portuguese merchants deep in prayer. The rabbi and several other men were detained. When questioned, the rabbi stated that he had come to Amsterdam from Emden eighteen months before at the request of several Portuguese merchants. He added that he had *'practised religion in the Jewish manner in this city (...) in his house, as required by the Law, by reading on the Sabbaths and at Passover, Pentecost and the Festival of Tabernacles'.*

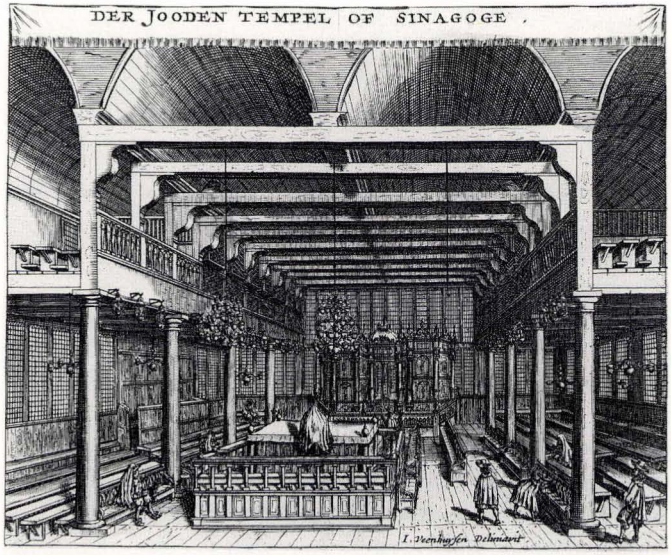
It is not known how this story ended, but it shows that the position of the Jews in Amsterdam was at first uncertain. However, their situation soon improved. The city authorities proved to be susceptible to the argument that the Jews repeatedly put forward, i.e. that they could make a welcome contribution to the city's economy. Despite strong protests from the orthodox Calvinists in the city administration, after a while the Jews were granted a large measure of freedom in how they practised their religion. In the first decade of the 17th century the Beth Jacob congregation was founded, followed by Neve Shalom, which was first mentioned in 1612, and in 1618 by Beth Israel.
In 1635 Ashkenazi Jews who had come to Amsterdam from Germany and Eastern Europe a few years earlier founded their first modest congregation.

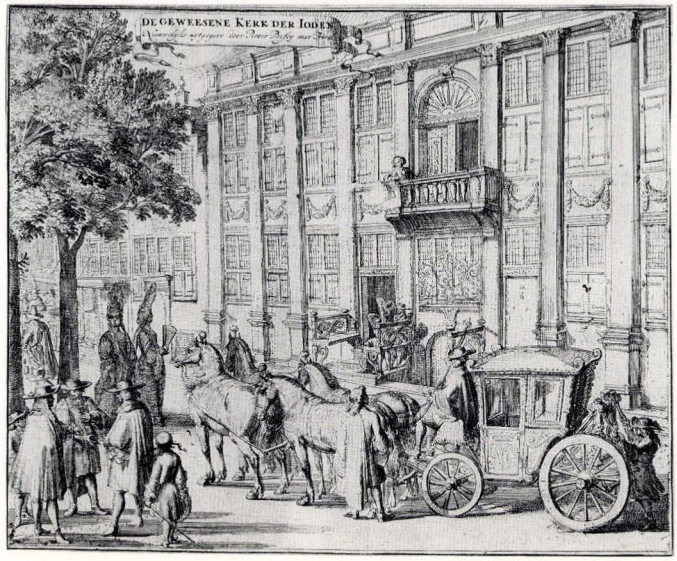
The three Sephardi congregations held their services in converted warehouses. In 1614 the Beth Jacob congregation rented a house called 'Antwerp' on the Houtgracht (the present Waterlooplein, where it meets the Zwanenburgwal). This house stood back a little from the street and

The Houtgracht synagogue, in use from 1639 to 1675. (Above: Jan Veenhuysen, 1662. Engraving, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam; Below: Romeyn de Hooghe, 1675 or later. Etching, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, on loan from the Cassuto collection, Portugal)

was reached through a side passage. Prayer meetings were held on the upper floor. In 1620 two annexes at the rear were made into a seminary. In 1630 the house became the property of the congregation.

After 1612 the Neve Shalom congregation had a house on the other side of the Houtgracht (to the left of the present Moses and Aaron Church). This house had a forecourt with a wall facing the street. The room for prayers on the upper floor was decorated with panels with Hebrew inscriptions and painted plants and trees. On the one short wall was the hechal in a niche which projected outwards like an apse, and on the other the women's gallery.





In 1618 Jose Pinto rented a warehouse on a back lot in the Jodenbreestraat, and a year later the adjoining warehouse on the Houtgracht. They were used by the third Sephardi congregation, Beth Israel, as a synagogue. To create more space, Jose Pinto had beams and part of the floor sawn out of both buildings. The timber was used to make galleries. In 1632 Beth Israel bought a piece of land next to the warehouse on the Houtgracht in order to build a new synagogue. When the three congregations joined together in 1639, Beth Israel's synagogue was taken over by the newly formed Talmud Tora congregation. The acquisition of the houses on each side substantially increased the size of the synagogue. It was given an elegant new façade with imposing Corinthian pilasters. The houses containing the synagogues of Beth Jacob and Neve Shalom were sold.

The synagogue of the Talmud Tora congregation

In his *Beschrijvinge van Amsterdam* ('Descriptions of Amsterdam') of 1665, Tobias van Domselaer presents a detailed picture of the interior of this synagogue: *'(...) below one enters a forecourt or large empty place where there is a Water Butt which is opened by a tap, with a*

towel hanging beside it, for the Jews wash their hands before entering the Church; on each side there are stairs leading up to their Church: The Women sit in the gallery above, separate from the Men and unseen by them; at the one end there is a great wooden box with two doors in which many precious objects are to be seen, among them the Books of Moses hung with costly embroidered mantles: their Teachers stand on a raised platform, about three foot above the rest: over their Hats the men wear a white shawl which hangs down over their shoulders and body, and each holds a Hebrew Book in his hand'.

Engravings by Jan Veenhuysen of about 1664 and a ground plan by Romeyn de Hooghe of about 1675 show that the synagogue had a wide nave with two barrel vaults flanked by two narrower aisles, each with one barrel vault. Space was at a premium and so galleries were built above the aisles. They were supported by eight Tuscan columns, and large crossbeams extended from the gallery on one side to that on the other. The part of the galleries that was screened off by grilles was intended for women. The ground floor was used by the men, as was the part of the galleries with open balustrades. Incidentally, galleries in aisles are also found in the Remonstrant Church of 1629, which lies hidden behind 102-108 Keizersgracht, and in the Old Lutheran Church of 1633 at the corner of Spui and Singel.

As Van Domselaer remarks, in the interior the accent was on the hechal, with its ornamental columns, and the tebah, which were both ringed by railings. The central section of the hechal ended at the top in a dome, possibly intended as a reminder of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The benches were placed lengthways. The pew for the mahamad was placed against the left wall. Veenhuysen's engraving shows that the interior was lit by a large number of lamps and chandeliers. In the synagogue, says Van Domselaer, *'glass lamps burn continually, and on important festivals chandeliers and large silver candlesticks'.* The basement under the synagogue probably housed the seminary Ets Haim, which was reached through a side passage.

In 1639 the synagogue was visited by Cosimo III de' Medici and in 1642 by Stadholder Frederick Henry, a sure sign that the uncertain beginnings of the Sephardi community in Amsterdam were a thing of the past. The synagogue on the Houtgracht became well known as the place where both the penance of Uriel da Costa and the excommunication of Baruch Spinoza occurred. It was used by the Talmud Tora congregation until 1675. Afterwards it was renovated several times and used as a warehouse, banquet room and auxiliary synagogue before finally being demolished in 1931.

An imposing synagogue complex

The constant flow of Jewish immigrants to Amsterdam in the 17th century meant that large new synagogues had to be built. The unexpected conversion of Sabbatai Zvi to Islam in 1666 must also have played a role. From Palestine this false messiah had raised the hopes of many Jews in the diaspora that there would soon be a return to Jerusalem. Once he had been unmasked, the Jews in Holland thought rather differently about how long they would stay



The Amsterdam synagogue complex. Extreme left, the Esnoga; extreme right, the Great Synagogue, with the New Synagogue (Neie Shul) adjoining, left. (Adolf van der Laan, 1752 or later. Engraving, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, on loan from the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Amsterdam University Library)

in the country. There was no more thought of a speedy departure for Jerusalem, and Amsterdam came to be regarded as a place of permanent residence. So a more permanent synagogue was required. Between 1670 and 1675 two buildings arose opposite each other on the Houtgracht: the Great Synagogue or Shul of the Ashkenazis and the Portuguese Synagogue, also known as the Snoge or Esnoga, of the Sephardis. As intended, these buildings gave expression to the prosperity and prestige achieved by the Jewish community during its seventy-five years in Amsterdam. They were to form the heart of the most imposing synagogue complex in the world. Never before had Jews had the freedom to build synagogues which were so monumental or so easily identifiable as such. It is all the more surprising that this was possible in Amsterdam when one remembers that until well into the 18th century the city's Roman Catholics had to make do with churches in private homes and warehouses.

Several Ashkenazi synagogues were later added: the Obbene Shul (1685), the Dritt Shul (1700) and the Neie Shul (1750-1752). Together with the Great Synagogue, these now house the Jewish

Historical Museum. The Portuguese Synagogue is the only one to retain its original function.

The building of the Great Shul

The new synagogue was built on a site close to the former St. Anthony's Gate which had become available as a result of the city's expansion. In January 1670 the Ashkenazi community bought four plots on which to build the Great Shul. Master mason Elias Bouman was responsible for the construction and Gillis van der Veen for the carpentry. On March 25 of the following year the ceremonial opening took place.

The building plans stated that Daniel Stalpaert would be involved in the project. As the city architect, he had played an important part in the expansion of Amsterdam. So it is not surprising that the Great Synagogue has much in common with Stalpaert's other work, such as the church in Oudshoorn (1663) and the Oosterkerk in Amsterdam (completed by Adriaan Dortsman in 1669). The centralised plan is clearly derived from these churches. The Great Shul has austere brick walls with frontons on the front and rear elevations.

The interior of the Great Shul, now part of the Jewish Historical Museum, is divided by four large columns into a nave and two narrower aisles, all three of which have wooden barrel-vaulted ceilings. There are galleries on three sides; on the fourth, eastern, side an ark with a splendid marble frame was built into the wall. The benches were arranged in a square around the platform for the cantor, which was in the middle of the synagogue.

A building committee for a new Portuguese synagogue

The Sephardi community could not lag behind the Ashkenazis. Although they formed a much smaller group, the Sephardis were far wealthier, and they had the financial resources to build on a grand scale.

On the initiative of the chief rabbi, Chacham Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, a building committee was formed. The members were Isaac de Pinto, Samuel Vaz, David Salom de Azevedo, Abraham da Veiga, Jacob Aboab Ozorio, Jacob Israel Pereyra and Isaac Henriques Coutiño. A sermon by Chacham Aboab on 23 November 1670 led to the congregation donating about forty thousand guilders. Three days later the building committee produced a report. They outlined three different plans for enlarging the synagogue, but also expressed a preference for an alternative based on building a completely new synagogue. For this purpose the committee recommended the acquisition of a large piece of land on the Houtgracht directly opposite the site where the Great Shul was being built. On 12 December 1670 the ground on which St. Anthony's Gate had once stood, opposite the Lepers' Hospital, was purchased for 32,993.10 guilders. A further 28,640 guilders for the building of the synagoge was contributed by members of the community in the form of interest-free loans to be repaid within ten years.

Various architects and master builders were invited to submit plans for the new synagogue. The gentlemen of the mahamad selected the design by Elias Bouman.

It is not known who his rivals were. As in the case of the Great Shul, the carpentry was to be done by Gillis van der Veen.

The master builder was to take account of the bye-law banning direct access from the public highway to places of worship other than those of the Reformed Church. But he also had to cater for a number of liturgical and functional requirements specific to a Sephardi synagogue.

The hechal and the tebah were to be the main orientation points in the interior. The hechal had to be on the east side, and in Sephardi synagogues in Holland the tebah belonged opposite, on the west side rather than in the centre. The congregation had to be able to see both hechal and tebah, and this is why the benches were placed lengthways, in line with the east-west axis. So the shape required for a synagogue was different to that of a Roman-Catholic church, where the altar is the only focus and all the emphasis is on the longitudinal axis. No less inappropriate was the centralised plan of a Protestant church, with the pulpit in the middle. The best solution was a 'short rectangle', in which axiality and centrality would be combined. The master builder also had to provide for separate areas for women, with a separate entrance.

In addition, a Jewish congregation always needs various other areas. This is why the synagogue is often part of a complex containing separate classrooms and study areas, offices, accommodation and a mikveh.

Who was Elias Bouman?

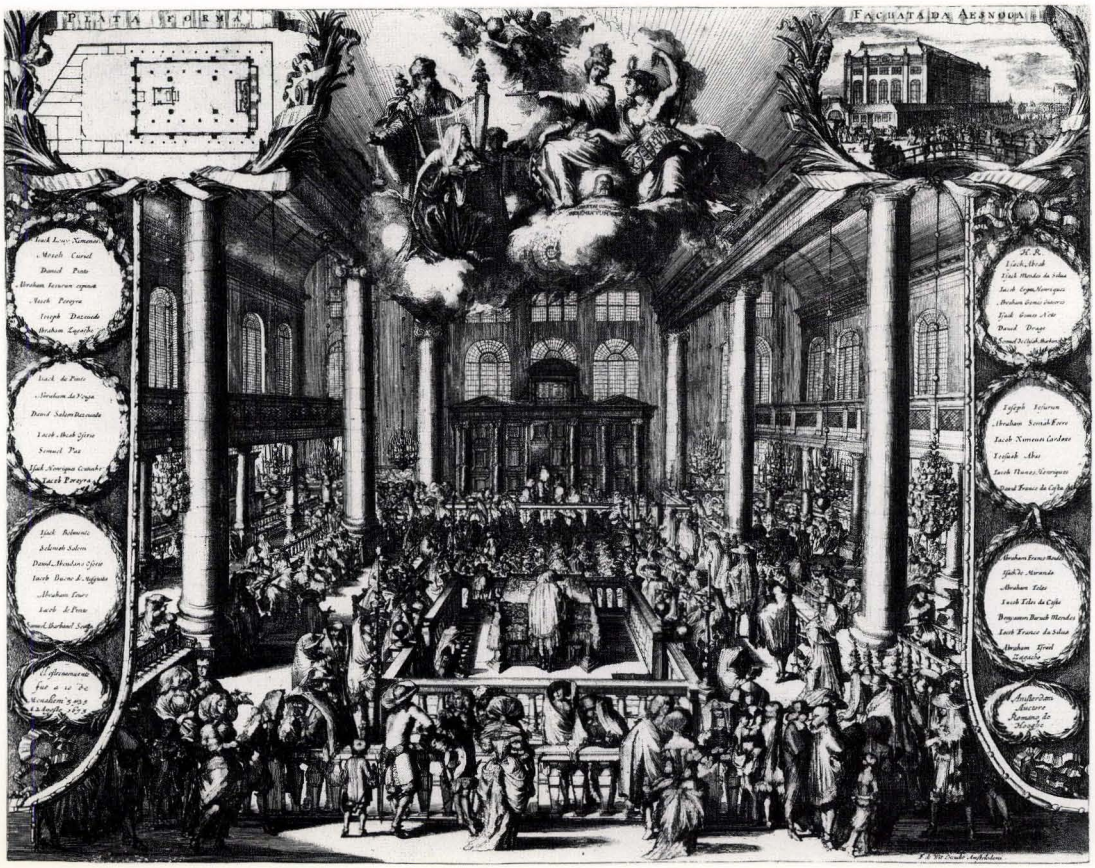
The Portuguese Jews had to commission a Gentile architect because Jews were not allowed to enter Dutch guilds. Only members of the masons' guild could practise architecture. However, Elias Bouman was a familiar figure in Jewish circles. He had been the master mason of the Great Shul and had carried out commissions for Portuguese Jews. He had built two mansions on the Binnen-Amstel, numbers 224 and 226, the former commissioned by the broker David van Abraham Cardozo. He was also asked to help in matters not directly to do with his profession. He attended the wedding of the Portuguese Jew Mozes Israel and he was chosen to arbitrate in a dispute between Jacob Aboab Ozorio and Josua Abendana.

Born in 1636, Elias Bouman was the eldest son of the master mason Claes Barentsz, known later as Bouman ('builder'). He probably qualified as a master in about 1660. He was to be appointed master mason of the city of Amsterdam in 1681 as a token of appreciation. An advertisement which appeared after his death in the *Amsterdamsche Dinsdaegsche Courant* of 14 May 1686 provides evidence that he was a cultivated man who was not involved simply as a craftsman in the building of the synagogue: *'At Amsterdam at the Atlas on the Nieuwendijk a sale of the books of the late Elias Bouman, formerly City Architect, consisting of a large number of mathematical and architectural volumes, and many curious instruments (...)'.*

'Bouman's masterpiece'

The foundation stones of the new synagogue were laid by wealthy members of the community, who paid generously for the

privilege, on 17 April 1671. They were David van Isaac de Pinto, Mozes Curiel also known as Jeronimo Nunes da Costa, Joseph Israel Nunes also known as Antonio Alvares and Imanuel de Pinto. According to the plan for the carpentry, the synagogue should have been largely complete by May 1672. But in that year the Republic was attacked from three sides and only narrowly avoided defeat. This put a stop to work on the synagogue, and building again stopped when a hurricane destroyed most of the windows and a balustrade. It was not until 1675 that the building was finally ready for use. The total construction costs had risen to 164,365 guilders, excluding the cost of the land. The inauguration ceremonies began on 2 August and lasted for eight days, just like the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem under the Maccabees. The festivities were on such a scale that one spectator could hardly believe that he was witnessing the inauguration of a synagogue by Jews in exile. The sermons preached during the week-long celebrations were published in a book illustrated by four prints by Romeyn de Hooghe *(Sermoes que pregarão os doctos*



The inauguration of the Esnoga in 1675. Above, left, a plan of the building and right, a view from the southwest. In the centre an allegory of the United Provinces, Amsterdam, Judah and Religious Freedom; in Latin: 'The Republic thrives through Freedom of Conscience'. The medallions along either side register the names of the various congregation members who contributed to the building and the inauguration.
Note: the artist omitted the chandeliers in order not to obstruct the view of the hechal. The original windows, with their small diamond-shaped lead-framed panes, can be clearly seen.
(Romeyn de Hooghe, c. 1675. Etching, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, on loan from the Cassuto collection, Portugal)

ingenios do K.K. de Taalmud Torah des ta cidade de Amsterdam). Romeyn de Hooghe wrote a poem lauding Bouman's work and making a pun on his name: *'This, the school of the law, the Jews' house of prayer/Bouman's masterpiece, the honour of the new work'.*

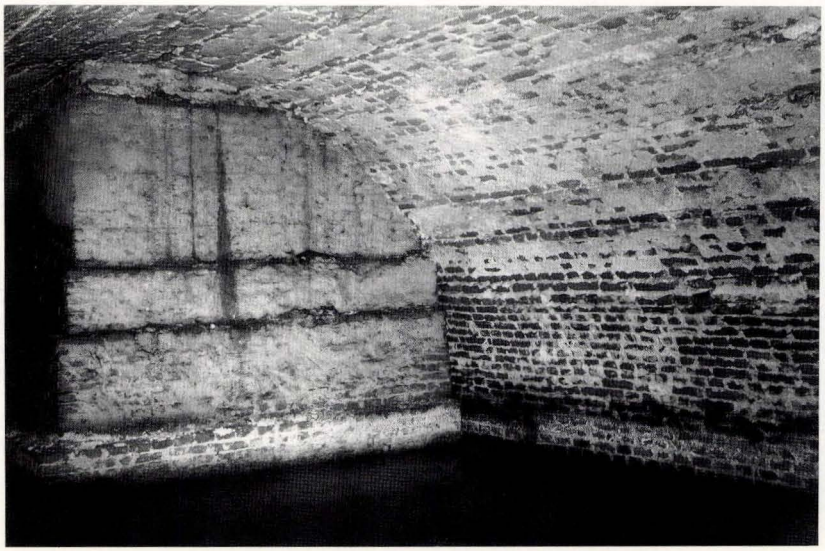
Architecture and design of the Portuguese Synagogue

The exterior

The Portuguese Synagogue marked a climax in the development of synagogue architecture. The imposing building covered almost an entire block and its size was such that it completely overshadowed the Great Shul of the Ashkenazis on the other side of what was then the Houtgracht. The main building of the Sephardi synagogue measures 36 x 28 x 19.5 metres, while the Ashkenazi synagogue is 18.5 x 17 x 16.9 metres. From whatever angle, the impressive, elegant building was an eye-catcher. It fulfilled the wish expressed in the Talmud for the house of prayer to rise high above its surroundings. Like a massive block, it towers over the buildings enclosing it on three sides. The juxtaposition of these low buildings and the tall synagogue is particularly effective, making the latter seem even higher and more impressive than it is. This effect of height is strengthened by the buttresses and pilasters and by the tall, arched windows. In the past, when the building was enclosed by the narrow Muiderstraat, the Rapenburgerstraat and the Houtgracht (filled in in 1882), its huge size would have been even more evident than it is now. The overwhelming impression it made at that time is shown by a story recounted in *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten* by J.J. Schudt (1714). Legend had it that the building would have been even higher if the city authorities had not intervened for fear that a hostile fortress was being constructed.

The synagogue rests on brick barrel vaults, as specified in the contract with Elias Bouman. The open space under five of the six vaults can be reached only by boat, since the foundations are deep under the ground water. The whole structure stands on about three thousand wooden piles.

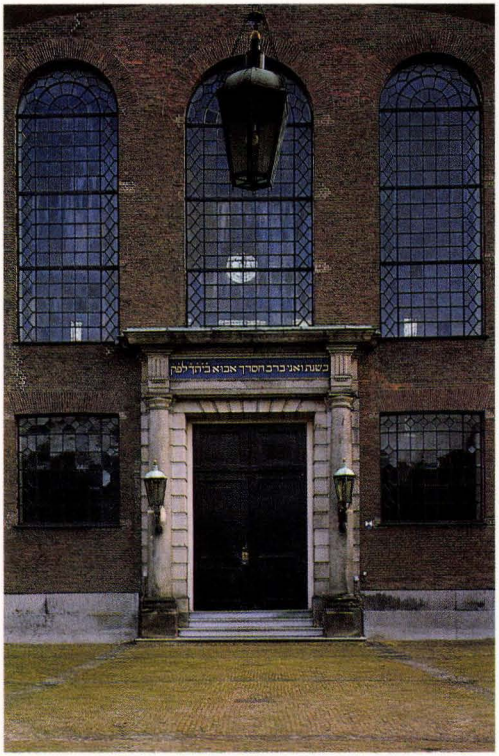
At first sight the synagogue looks like a larger version of the Great Shul, but it is even plainer than its Ashkenazi neighbour, lacking frontons on the front and rear. The Esnoga takes the form of a rectangular block; the smooth sides are articulated only by pilasters. The block shape is underlined by the balustrade with vases which tops the walls and largely conceals the roof.



A brick barrel vault under the Esnoga, with its underwater foundations. The foot of one of the great columns juts right through the vault.

The arrangement of high arched windows between upper and lower rows of smaller square windows is the same as in the Great Shul and the Oosterkerk.

In accordance with the prevailing style, Bouman gave the front of the synagogue a severely classical look. It is divided by pilasters into a central section which is three window bays wide, with narrower sections one window bay wide on each side. The pilasters slant out at the bottom. In this sober, almost aloof brick façade our attention is drawn to the entrance, which is in stone. It is flanked by Tuscan columns.



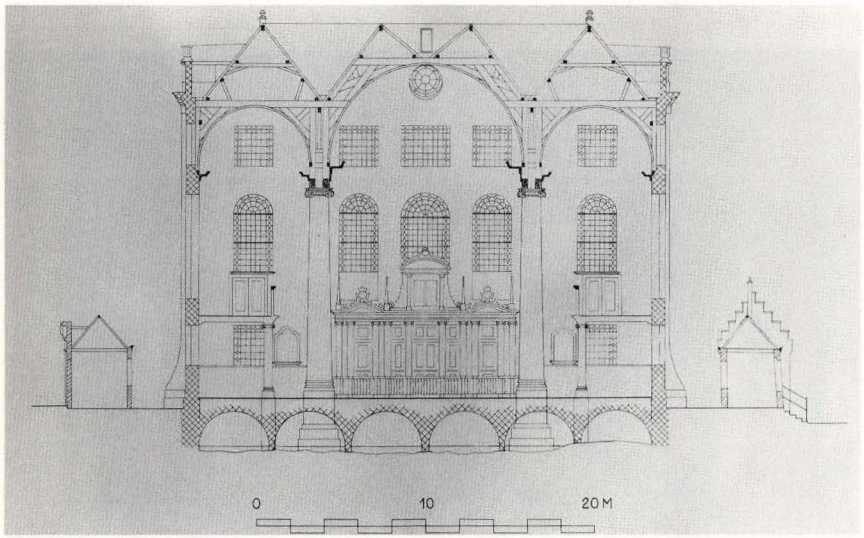


Interior of the Esnoga seen from the east; the entrance is at the back, behind the tebah. The wooden shafts in the corners conceal the winding staircases to the roof.

The frieze above the door bears gilt Hebrew letters giving the planned year of opening (5)432 (i.e. 1672) and the words from Psalm 5, verse 8: *'I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy'.* The name of Chacham Aboab can be recognised in the Hebrew text.

A pattern of two-three-two window bays is used on the north and south sides. Both have entrances, but that on the north side is there only for the sake of symmetry. The pew of the 'parnassim' (board mem-

The Esnoga entrance seen from the main gate.



Cross-section of the Esnoga. (Sketch for the Historical Buildings Department, after J.S. Baars and J.W. Kuiper, with additions by D.P. Cohen Paraira)

bers) stands behind this door, preventing it from being used.

The rear has an unusual feature consisting of two staircases with a landing in between which rests on arched alcoves and is supported by heavy buttresses that slant sharply outwards at the bottom. This structure dates from 1773-1774, when the east side of the synagogue was altered. The original appearance of the east side can be seen in engravings by Romeyn de Hooghe and in a painting by Gerrit Adriaensz. Berckheyde (see back cover). This painting shows a central entrance with stairs on each side leading up to two mezzanine rooms which gave access to the galleries.

The synagogue is enclosed on three sides by wings with low buildings. Originally, the two long wings had arcades on the sides facing the synagogue, but these were later filled in, except for a small section on the north side. In this surviving section there was a water butt or pump so that people could wash before entering the synagogue. At the west end the wings of low buildings enclose a large forecourt. This was where members of the congregation gathered before and after the service, and where children could play safely despite all the surrounding water.

The interior

The expectations raised by the majestic exterior are fully met in the interior, which has remained virtually unchanged since it was built. The huge stone columns, dark wooden furniture, white walls and brass chandeliers make an overwhelming impression. This splendid interior can accommodate over 1200 men and 440 women. It has a very open lay-out that is bathed in a sea of light from 72 windows.

The wooden barrel vaults spanning the aisles and the unusually large nave are supported by four huge Ionic columns in Bremen sandstone and by demi-columns against the end walls. In contrast to the Great Shul, where both galleries and vaults rest on the large central columns, the galleries here are supported by twelve separate stone columns in the aisles. Originally these were of wood, but when King-Stadholder William III paid a visit in 1690, he decided that wooden columns were unworthy of such a magnificent building. Through his efforts, stone was found for the columns, although it was hard to obtain at the time. The galleries, which were intended for women, were screened off from the main space by grilles.

The furnishings are arranged in the same way as in the earlier synagogue of the Talmud Tora congregation dating from

1639. The hechal to the east, the direction of Jerusalem, and the tebah to the west are the ends of an axis which dominates the interior. Of all the surviving synagogues in Amsterdam, the Esnoga is the most accurately oriented towards Jerusalem. The benches are placed lengthways so that the congregation sits in two groups facing each other and can see both the hechal and the tebah.

The showpiece of the interior is the huge hechal in Brazilian jacaranda wood, a generous gift by Mozes Curiel. Extending across the east wall for the whole breadth of the nave, the hechal is richly decorated with columns, obelisks and festoons. The wings are topped by triangular frontons, and above them are shields with words from Malachi 4.4 which in translation read: *'Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel'.* The higher central section has an arched fronton on columns which forms a canopy over the rectangular tables of the law on which the ten commandments are written in twenty lines in gilt letters. This is probably the first example of an Ark with the tables of the law. Above the fronton there is a crown on which *'Keter Tora'* (Crown of the Law) is written in gilt letters. Many scrolls of the law are kept in the hechal. On the inside it is still covered with the original deep-red gilt leather with large floral motifs. The smaller cases on the sides are covered inside with 18th-century green gilt leather with Louis Quinze motifs. The space around the hechal is marked off by a railing with brass candlesticks and round ornaments. The 'chuppah' (wedding canopy) beside the hechal dates from the 1950s and is placed in the nave for weddings.



The Esnoga tebah with the Chacham's seat in front.

The tebah, like the hechal, is made of jacaranda wood. In Sephardi synagogues the tebah is often placed at one end. This is in fact surprising because the 12th-century Sephardi jurist Maimonides had pointed out that readings from a centrally placed bimah or tebah were easy to follow. But Joseph Caro, who wrote a commentary on Maimonides's codification in the 16th century, expressed a preference for having the tebah at one end rather than in the middle of the space. In his day



Hechal with doors opened. The inside, visible behind the Torah scrolls, is decorated in gilt leather. In the centre, above the hechal is the arm of the crown in which the ner tamid burns.

synagogues were small, so the congregation could hear readings anyway. In Italian synagogues of that time, because of lack of space, the tebah is often right up against the western wall or even in a recess. Caro's preference was largely followed in Amsterdam, although the tebah is free-standing and not part of the wall.

In accordance with religious rules, the tebah is enclosed by a railing. This has brass candlesticks and, beside the steps, large brass balls over which to hang Torah mantles. In front of the tebah is the bench for the Chacham.

Immediately facing the main entrance to the synagogue is a heavy oak railing on which stand brass offertory boxes. There are identical boxes beside the doors leading to both galleries. The small oak bench with desk next to the entrance dates from the beginning of this century and was intended for the conductor of 'Santo Servicio', the Portuguese-Jewish choral society.

The building does not have electric lighting. Instead it has the original twenty-six chandeliers in three sizes, which can hold no less than three hundred candles. Some of the smaller chandeliers probably came from the Talmud Tora synagogue and even older synagogues dating from before 1639, when the three congregations



Brass offertory box attached to the railing inside the entrance to the Esnoga.

were united. The large chandeliers are so unique that copies were made for the Nieuwe Kerk on the Dam. Where the rods holding the chandeliers meet the ceiling there are large wooden rosettes painted blue and partly gilded. The joints in these rods are camouflaged by gilded wooden balls. The large chandelier nearest to the east incorporates the ner tamid, the eternal flame commemorating the seven-branched candlestick in the Temple.

The floor of the synagogue is made of pine, and fine sand is still scattered over it, as was normally done in the past. The sand absorbs dust and dirt from shoes and dampens the sound of footsteps.



Interior of the Esnoga with hechal, seen from the west.

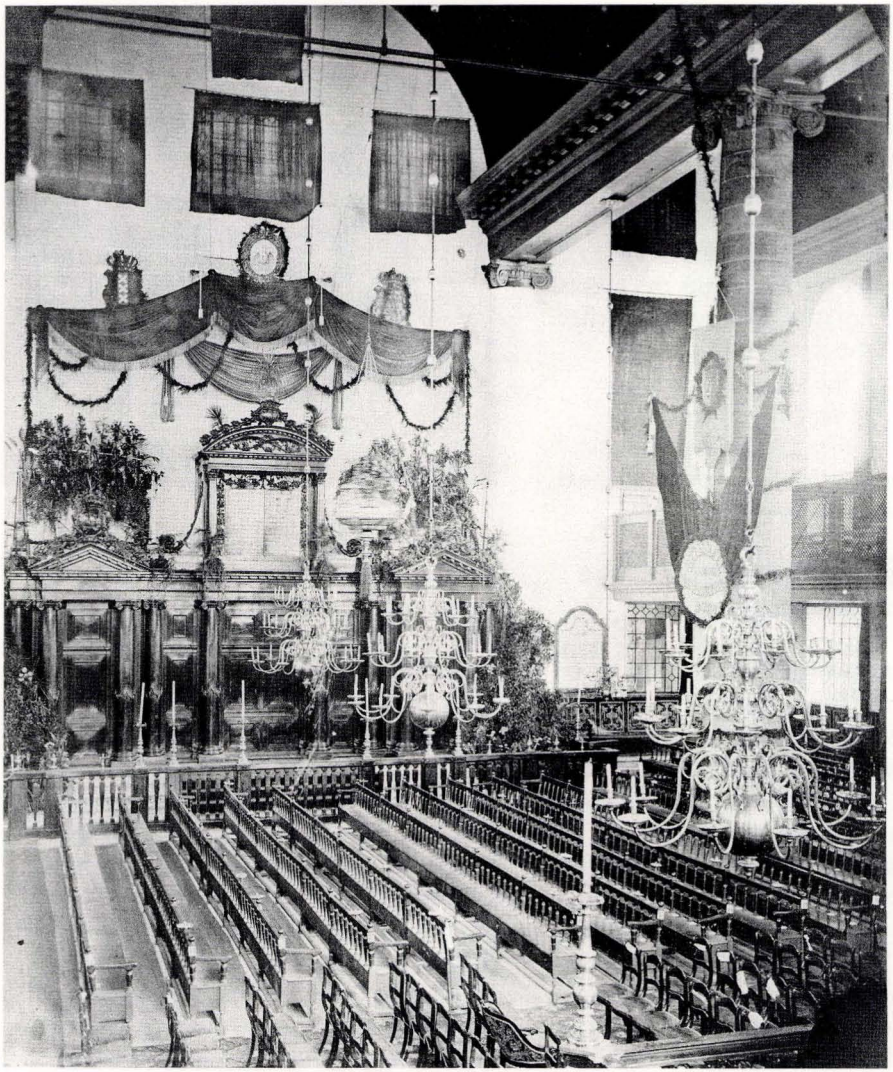
The Portuguese Synagogue in the history of architecture

The committee which organised the competition for the design of the new synagogue in 1671 would have applied different kinds of criteria when judging the entries. The design had to conform to both the usual municipal regulations and the specific liturgical and functional requirements of Sephardi worship described above. It also had to be modern. Finally, it is possible that they were looking for a design that would lend itself to symbolic interpretation. Elias Bouman succeeded in meeting all these varying requirements in a magnificent synthesis.

A classical masterpiece

Despite the specific requirements involved in designing a synagogue, the building is a perfect example of the style of architecture prevailing in Holland in the second half of the 17th century. The classical style was the one chosen for the major buildings in Amsterdam at the time, from the Town Hall on the Dam by Jacob van Campen (completed in about 1665 by Daniel Stalpaert) to the Walloon Orphanage (1669-1671) by Adriaen Dortsman, the Marine Arsenal (1655-1656) by Stalpaert and the Oosterkerk (1669-1671), which was probably designed by Stalpaert and completed by Dortsman. It was not to be expected that Elias Bouman would adopt an essentially different style. Together with Stalpaert, he had been involved in the building of the Great Shul. His appointment as master mason of the city in 1681 is further evidence of his familiarity with the prevailing style of his day.

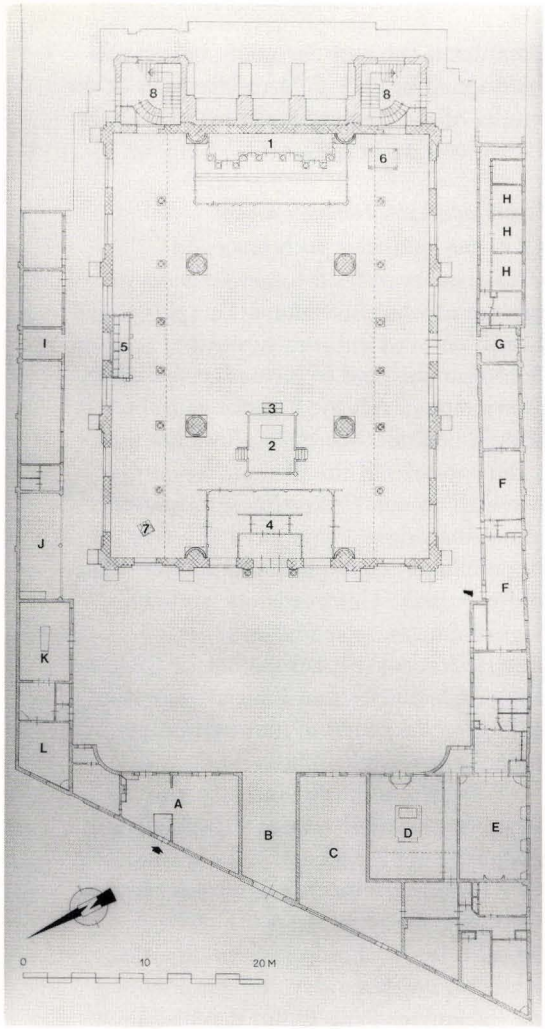
The classical style was based on principles derived from Greek and Roman architecture which were then adapted to suit contemporary requirements as to construction, function and aesthetics. Plain geometrical forms, sparing use of



The Esnoga decorated for the 200th anniversary celebrations in 1875. The pillars bore the names of the three pre-1639 congregations of Amsterdam. Above the hechal is the congregation's coat of arms showing the pelican, on either side the arms of the city and of Holland. The two marble plaques on either side of the hechal were donated to commemorate this occasion. The gilt leather screen on the wainscot to the right of the hechal was lost during the Second World War.

decoration and consistently applied symmetry were the main points. A building was thought of as an entity in itself, not as part of a larger whole. This is why there was a preference for buildings with free space on all sides.

In its monumentality, balanced proportions and austere forms, the Portuguese Synagogue belongs entirely to the classical tradition. It is strictly symmetrical both inside and out. The need for symmetry was so compelling that the north side was given



Plan of the Esnoga complex.
Synagogue:
1. hechal; 2. tebah; 3. seat for Chacham; 4. vestibule; 5. seats for the parnassim; 6. chuppah; 7. seat of the former choir master; 8. stairs for the women's galleries.
Surrounding buildings:
A. main entrance (Mendes Coutinho house); B. Mr Visserplein entrance; C. Ets Haim library; D. winter synagogue; E. mahamad; F. office; G. Jonas Daniël Meijerplein entrance; H. mikveh; I. Muiderstraat entrance; J. arcade with washing facilities; K. mourners' room; L. rabbi's office.
(Sketch for the Historical Buildings Department, after J.S. Baars and J.W. Kuiper, with additions by D.P. Cohen Paraira)

a door, just like the one on the south side, even though it was blocked by the bench for the parnassim behind it. Similarly, the upper windows along the sides, which continue the window rows on the front and rear, have no function because any light is blocked by the vaulted wooden ceiling behind them. Finally, the closed central sections of the balustrades on the north and south sides must be seen in relation to the similarly closed sections above the east and west sides. The similarities with other classical buildings, such as the Walloon Orphanage, the Marine Arsenal and above all Daniel Stalpaert's churches, are unmistakable. As with the Great Shul, the round-arched windows between two tiers of square windows and the pilasters slanting sharply outwards at the base are directly derived from the Oosterkerk and Stalpaert's church in Oudshoorn (1663-1665). Equally, the interior, with its walls plastered white and wooden barrel vaults supported by sandstone columns, is reminiscent of Protestant churches of the second half of the 17th century.

Symbolism in the architecture of the Portuguese Synagogue

Although the Portuguese Synagogue closely follows the rational plan of the Dutch



The seats for the parnassim, decorated with pilasters and horns of plenty.

classical style, its architecture expresses a specifically Jewish symbolism. The final form and design were influenced by conjectures about the appearance of Solomon's Temple. There were differing views as to what the Temple had looked like, but everyone was agreed that it must have been a rectangular complex consisting of a forecourt and the actual temple building, which contained the Holy of Holies with the Ark of the Covenant. At the entrance to the Temple there were two columns called Jachin and Boas.

These basic features are found in the Portuguese Synagogue. As the Talmud recommends, it rises high above its surroundings. The low buildings around it form a forecourt on the west side leading to an entrance flanked by columns. The layout of the interior, with the railing at the entrance and in front of the hechal, shows some similarity with that of the Temple, where there was also a separation between the vestibule, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The tables of Moses shown on the raised central section of the hechal and the 'Crown of the Law' on top of it strengthen the link with the Ark in Solomon's Temple.

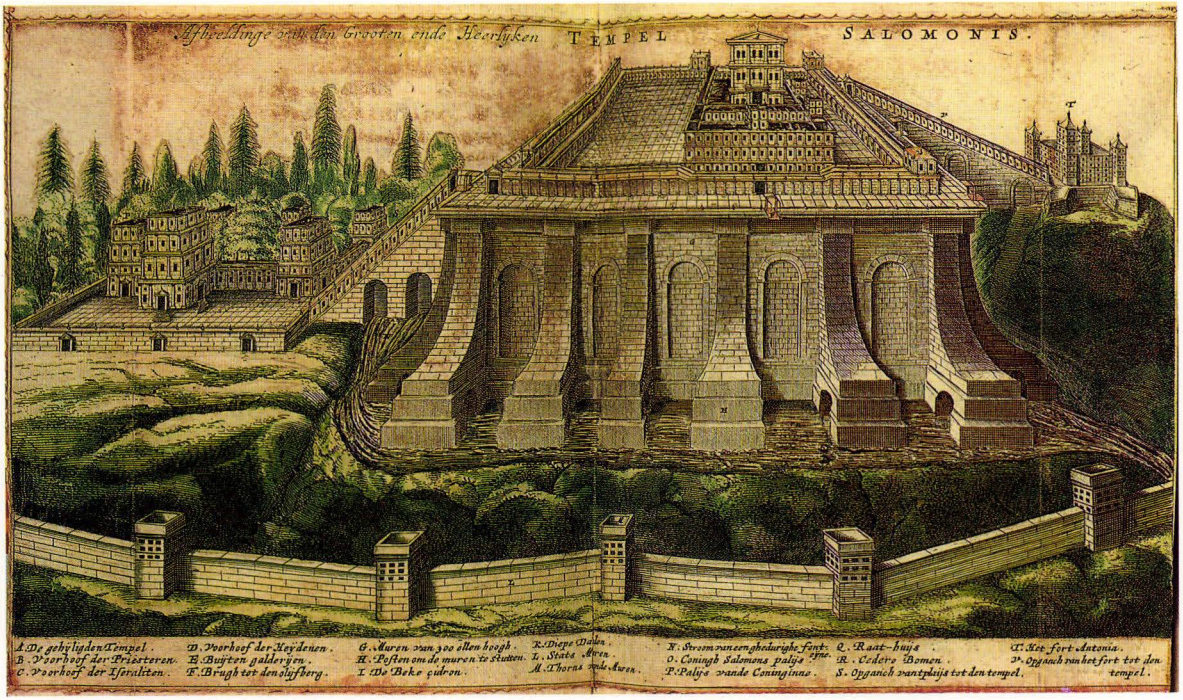
The design may also have numerological elements. Some view the twelve columns supporting the galleries as a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel. It has also been suggested that the seventy-two windows lighting the building were intended to remind the faithful of the numerical value of the letters of the name of the Creator written in full.

The part of the Esnoga which may well bear the closest resemblance to the Temple complex is the rear elevation, which was redesigned in 1773-1774 on the basis of the model of the Temple made by Jacob Juda Leon Templo in 1642.

Jacob Juda Leon Templo's model

Over the centuries both Jews and Christians have tried to get an accurate picture of what Solomon's Temple looked like. It enjoyed enormous prestige because Solomon was said to have received direct instructions from the Creator as to how it should be built. Moreover, Jews are under a duty to rebuild the Temple when the Messiah comes. Collecting information about the original Temple was a way of hopefully anticipating the fulfilment of an old prophecy. Unfortunately, archaeological data were scarce and the descriptions of the Temple in the Bible in Kings, Chronicles and Ezekiel were not sufficiently detailed to make complete reconstruction possible.

Particularly during and after the Renaissance, there was much speculation about the appearance of the Temple. One highly ambitious and authoritative reconstruction was the work of two Spanish Jesuits, Prado and Villalpando, who had written a detailed commentary on Ezekiel for King Philip II. Villalpando was an expert on classical architecture and devoted a large part of this commentary to the Temple. The work of these Jesuits long enjoyed great authority among practitioners and students of architecture. One of their successors was a Dutch-Portuguese teacher, Rabbi Jacob Juda Leon (1602-1675), who was deeply fascinated by the subject. In the eyes of his contempo-



raries he was so completely identified with his studies in this field that he was given the nickname 'Templo'. His descendants added this to the family name.

Jacob Juda Leon Templo published a book entitled *Afbeeldinge vanden Tempel Salomonis* ('Illustrations of the Temple of Solomon') in Middelburg in 1642. A second, revised, edition appeared two years later in Amsterdam. In his descriptions of the Temple he made use of information and arguments provided by Villalpando and Prado, but he added some noteworthy differences in emphasis. As conceived by Leon Templo, the Temple was more sober, less baroque – in short more 'Dutch' – than in Villalpando's vision.

Leon Templo's book was reprinted several times and translated into no less

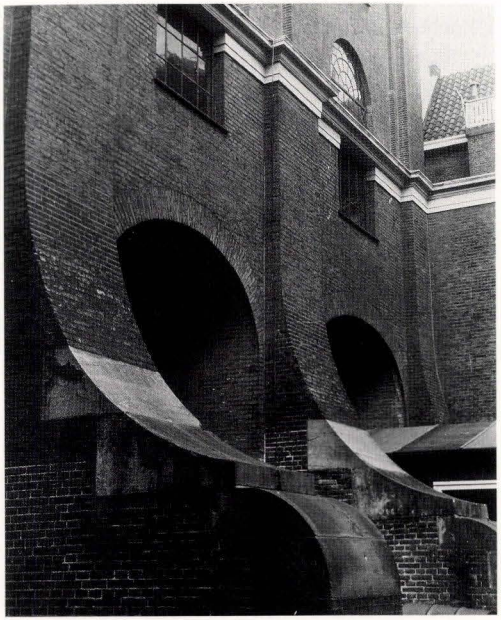


Illustration of Solomon's Temple according to Jacob Juda Leon Templo, taken from Biblia Hebraica, *published in 1667 by the Jewish printer Joseph Athias of Amsterdam.*
(Anonymous, 1667. Coloured engraving, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam)

The back of the Esnoga with the sharply outward slanting buttresses which were added in 1773-1774 and followed Jacob Juda Leon Templo's model.

than seven languages. No doubt one of the reasons for this success was that, in contrast to the book by Villalpando and Prado, it was very readable and so reached a lay audience. The descriptions were accompanied by clear illustrations. Furthermore, in the interests of complete clarity, it was possible to view the author's wooden model of the Temple, measuring 1.80 x 1.20 x 0.60 metres, at his home. This attracted sight-seers from all over the country.

Encouraged by all this interest, Leon Templo went on to write another book on similar lines about the tabernacle which predated Solomon's Temple. He made a model of it too. The models could be taken apart and reassembled and Leon Templo went on tour with them. They were even shown to Stadholder William II and his consort Maria Henriette Stuart, and to Charles II's court in London.

There are indications that Leon Templo's ordinary duties tended to be neglected because of his preoccupation with his models. Many of his pupils took extra lessons from other teachers and in 1665 he was demoted from teaching the sixth to the fifth class at the Ets Haim seminary. Earlier the governors had ordered him not to display his Temple model on Saturdays and holidays on pain of dismissal.

For a long time after Leon Templo's death in 1675 nothing was heard of his model. But then the following advertisement appeared in the *'s Gravenhaegse Courant* of 10 May 1771: *'Here is arrived the Truly Remarkable and Ingenious TEMPLE OF SOLOMON, in three Parts, namely the Temple, the King's Palace and the Fort of Marcus Antonius, with its Mountains and all appurtenances, which has not been displayed for eighty Years, made after the Architecture of the late learned teacher JACOB JUDA LEON, Hebrew, 130 Years ago, and to be displayed all days of the month of May (except Saturdays and Sundays) with a complete Explanation, next to where the sign of the Paradise hangs above Kalkstraetje, near the Voorhout in The Hague; each person pays 11 stuivers, and in a private Group alone each Person pays one Guilder. N.B. This Temple is for sale.'*

The model then disappears from sight once more. However, it must have retained its strong appeal to the imagination when it was re-exhibited because it served as the basis for the alterations made to the east side of the Portuguese Synagogue in 1773-1774. The two projecting mezzanine rooms were removed and two staircases added. These were joined by a landing on arched alcoves supported by four exceptionally massive buttresses that slanted sharply outwards at the base. Buttresses of this type were a characteristic feature of Templo's model. He could have wished for no finer tribute than to have his model influence the alterations made to one of the most important synagogues in the Netherlands.

The Esnoga as mother synagogue

The Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam was renowned everywhere. Its beauty was universally praised and inspired numerous artists. It served as a model for many architects designing later synagogues. The placing of the tebah and hechal at opposite ends had been done before, e.g. in

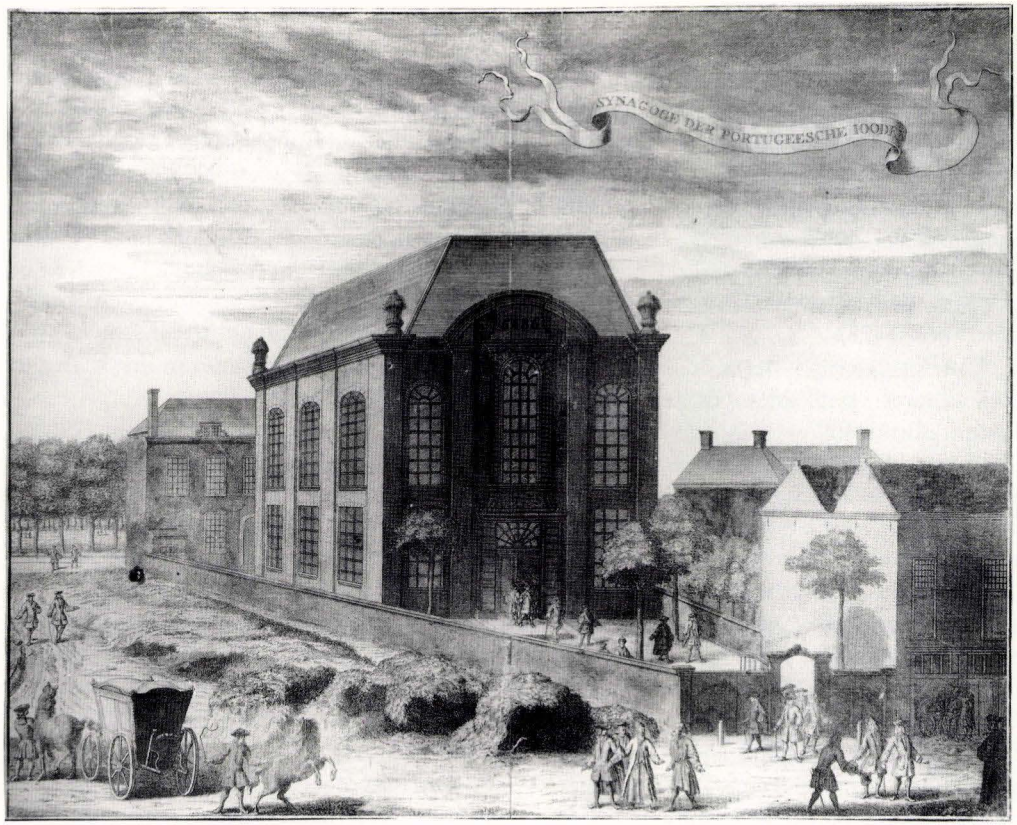
the Talmud Tora synagogue of 1639, but it was due to the prestige of the Portuguese Synagogue that this arrangement became standard for all Sephardi synagogues in the West. It was followed in Livorno (c. 1700), London (1701), Willemstad (1732), Paramaribo, Surinam (1737), Naarden (1759), Newport, Rhode Island (1763), and New York (1897).

The Portuguese Synagogue may have been admired on all sides, but its example was not always followed in every particular. The Sephardi synagogue built in The Hague in 1725-1726 by Felix du Sart to a design by Daniel Marot has traditionally been viewed in relation to the Amsterdam Esnoga. Luïscius even referred to a *'second Portuguese synagogue, lately built on the model of the one in Amsterdam and opened in the year 1726'.* There are indeed many resemblances in the overall design. The synagogue in The Hague also stands on an enclosed site with a forecourt and a separate administrative building on the side of the main entrance. The interior lay-out is clearly modelled on that in Amsterdam: when benches were added in 1743, it was done *'de la manera de la Esnoga de Amsterdam'* ('in the manner of the Esnoga in Amsterdam'). There is a row of two columns and two demi-columns on each side as in the Amsterdam synagogue, but here they support the women's galleries on the long sides. The two staircases at the rear which ascend sideways to the galleries from the entrance in the middle are essentially the same as those in Amsterdam before they were replaced in 1773. But despite these resemblances, the overall impression made by each synagogue is different. The building in The Hague is much more graceful and intimate than its massive and imposing counterpart in Amsterdam. Its dimensions are smaller, its proportions different, and its front more playful in character. The door in the centre and the arched window above it are framed in stone blocks, and the whole is crowned by an arched fronton above a cornice which projects and recedes in line with the articulation of the façade.

The snoge in Maarssen, built in 1720 and demolished in 1839, had many similarities with both the Hague and the Amsterdam synagogue. The hechal has survived and now stands in the small synagogue in the Springweg in Utrecht. The upper part of this hechal is a smaller copy of the one in Amsterdam and has the tables of the law in the middle and an arched fronton with the 'Crown of the Law'.

Because of its large dimensions, the Portuguese Synagogue has remained almost unique in its combination of four free-standing columns in the centre with galleries on separate columns in the aisles. It was much more normal for the galleries to be set inside the columns or pillars supporting the vaults. In this respect later synagogues more closely resembled the Great Shul.

The Mikveh Israel synagogue in Willemstad on Curaçao, the oldest synagogue in the Americas, faithfully follows the Amsterdam model in many ways and is almost the only other example of a synagogue combining free-standing columns in the middle with galleries on separate columns. It was built in 1732 by



The Portuguese Synagogue in The Hague, built in 1725-1726. (J.C. Philips, after G. van Giessen, 1729. Engraving, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, on loan from the Cassuto collection, Portugal)

master carpenters Pieter Roggenburg and Hendrik Schielagh. Later on the galleries were joined by a third gallery.

Another interesting exception was the Portuguese Synagogue in Naarden (1758-1759), which also had two rows of freestanding columns. It was very small: the columns were not only for structural purposes but also a deliberate imitation of the mother synagogue in Amsterdam. The Naarden synagogue was demolished in 1935. The only remains are the brass chandeliers, candlesticks and orbs now in the council chamber in Naarden's town hall.

The oldest surviving synagogue for which Amsterdam served as a model is Bevis Marks (1701) in London, the work of Joseph Avis. The design of the hechal, the tebah and the benches is the same as in Amsterdam, but the detailing and ornamentation are typically English. There are other differences as well. The interior has a single nave without aisles and the two rows of columns are missing. There are galleries on three sides which are reached through a vestibule at the front of the building.

The Touro synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island dates from 1759 and is the oldest synagogue still in use in North

America. It was declared a protected historic building in 1946. Its architecture derives largely from Bevis Marks in London and thus ultimately from the Amsterdam Esnoga. The same is true of the synagogue of the Shearith Israel congregation in New York, which was built in 1897. As the members of this congregation moved from one neighbourhood to another from 1730 onwards, they continually built new synagogues and demolished the old ones. The present synagogue is the fifth to be built and is still in use.

A close similarity to the Amsterdam Esnoga is evident in the synagogue of the Sephardi congregation in Paramaribo in Surinam, built in 1737. This is despite the fact that this slate-roofed building is made entirely of wood and painted white. The roof is supported by two rows of columns and a pulpit is placed against one column. There are galleries on three sides resting on short columns.

The building down the centuries

The Esnoga has been preserved in virtually its original state. The relatively minor changes made in the course of time have not affected the essential character of the building. This is true of the alterations made in the 17th and 18th centuries which have been described and of those made in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The restoration of 1852-1854

A major restoration project directed by the architect Isaac Warnsick was carried out between 1852 and 1854. The small leaded windows were replaced by windows in cast-iron frames with new sills in the same material. As a result, far more light entered the building. The two small windows over the side doors were made into one. A vestibule was added inside the entrance and the large outer doors were altered so



The 'mahamad', the meeting room of the parnassim, renovated in 1925 in honour of the 250th anniversary of the Esnoga. The parnassim are seated, left to right: A.J. Mendes da Costa (secretary), N. de Beneditty, Dr E.H. Vaz Nunes, M. Rodrigues de Miranda, M. Alvares Vega, M. Vaz Dias, J. Milhado and M. Cortissos.

that they no longer opened outwards.

Inside the synagogue wooden panelling was installed all round the walls. Benches with backs were put in the women's galleries. At that time there was a luxury tax on the use of plain oak, so many parts of the interior were painted to look like oak. The ceilings under the women's galleries, which were originally sky-blue, were also painted in this way. After this major restoration a special service was held in 1854 on Shabbath ha-Gadol, the sabbath immediately before Pesach.

Changes between 1854 and 1955

In 1875 the Esnoga's two hundredth anniversary was marked by placing memorial tablets in Carrara marble on either side of the hechal. They are the work of the stonemason M. Mendes da Costa. The tablet on the right gives the date and the occasion in gilt letters; the one on the left lists the names of the architect and the members of the congregation involved in the building of the Esnoga in the 17th century.

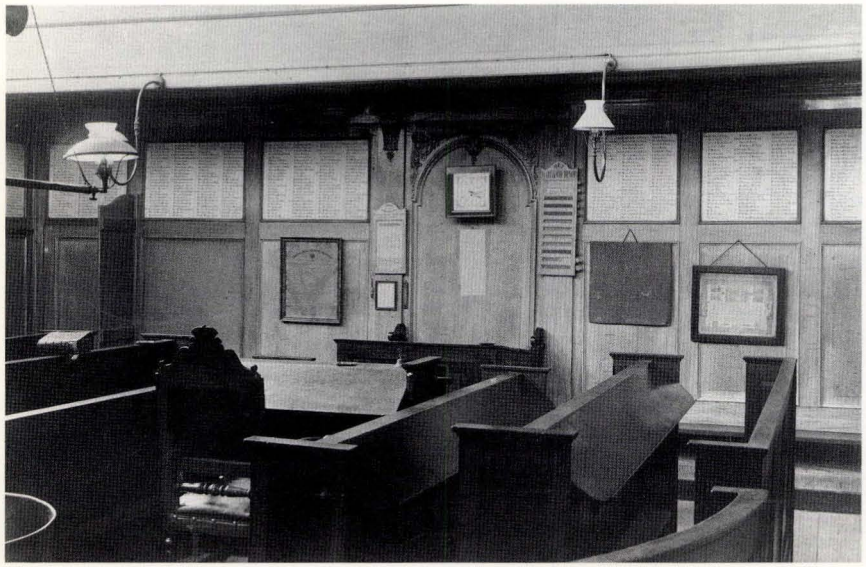
The section of the wing to the east of the entrance gate on the Jonas Daniël Meijerplein was replaced in 1891 by a new mikveh with a flat for the chazan above it designed by P.W. Nijhoff. The mikveh had separate sections for the paying and non-paying members of the congregation. The house and part of the mikveh were in turn replaced in 1939 by new housing designed by Harry Elte.

The Muiderstraat façade was restored at the end of the 19th century. At that time the congregation's old coat of arms showing a pelican feeding its young, probably an early work by the sculptor Josef Mendes da Costa, was placed above the gate.

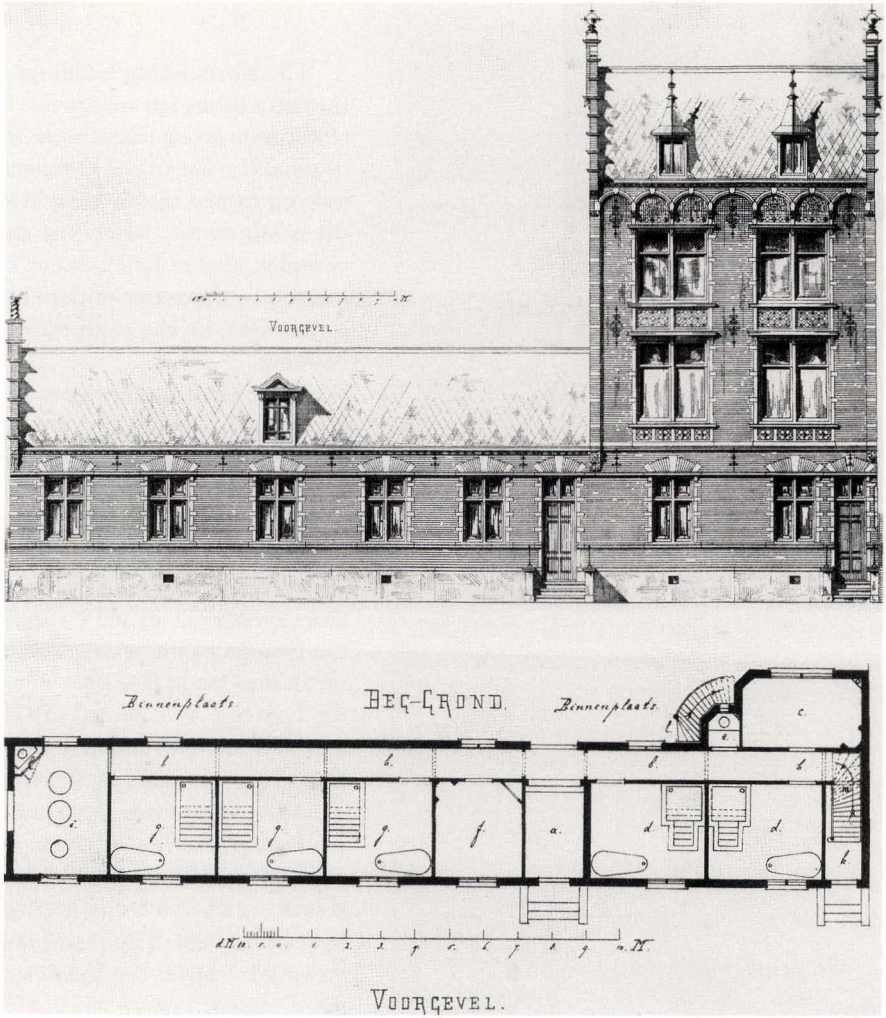
The elegant octagonal lamps which light the courtyard also date from the end of the 19th century. At about the same time the openings in the grilles on the women's galleries were enlarged.

For the Esnoga's two hundred and fiftieth anniversary the congregation had planned to install a pulpit, in exactly the same style as the hechal and tebah, against one of the large columns. The synagogue had just been placed on the list of historic buildings, so the parnassim submitted their proposal to the national historic monuments commission. It declared that the *'Portuguese Synagogue is a building of such beauty, in its lines, proportions and sober ornament, that no change whatsoever which might be made to the interior could improve it'.*

A plan to install lighting and heating was also rejected. It was said that the pace of technological advance was such that



The 'madras', the large auditorium of Ets Haim seminary. This area was rebuilt as a winter synagogue during the restoration of 1956-1959.



Sketch of the mikveh with the chazan's apartment above, designed by P.W. Nijhoff in 1891. The section to the right of the mikveh entrance was demolished in 1939.
Interior: a. vestibule; b. corridor; c. 1st class waiting room; d. 1st class baths; e. 1st class toilet; f. 2nd class waiting room; g. 2nd class baths; h. 2nd class toilet; i. boiler house; k. entrance to the apartment above

these systems would soon become outdated. However, it was decided to renovate the board room and to replace the furniture. The hand-knotted carpet on the tebah was made by the women of the congregation for this occasion.

The restoration of 1955-1959

Between 1955 and 1959 the architects J.S. Baars and J.W. Kuipers carried out major restoration work on the Esnoga, although it could not be completed because of lack of funds. The façades and the balustrade were restored and the roofing over the workshops between the buttresses at the rear was removed. The window-panes were replaced, and at the same time the windows above the hechal were



shortened and those above the main entrance replaced by wooden panels. The floor was raised slightly and the 19th-century paint layer was removed from the bench for the parnassim.

The surrounding buildings received similarly thorough treatment. During restoration work traces were found of the original lay-out of the complex. The first mikveh turned out to have been located in the north corner, where the entrance to the complex now is. Brick drains connected the mikveh to the water of the Houtgracht, as it then was, on the south side of the building.

The former auditorium of the Ets Haim seminary was converted into a 'winter synagogue', since, unlike the large Esnoga, it could be heated. The 'pautas' (lists of names of members of the seminary) on the walls were left in place. Some benches which originally came from the Talmud Tora synagogue of 1639 were moved from the Esnoga to the winter synagogue. A new tebah was made in a style matching that of the benches. The hechal of 1744 with two sets of doors one above the other comes from the room used by the Keriat Sefer Tora (Reading from the Torah) society in the Portuguese-Jewish home for elderly married couples in the Muiderstraat. Its shape is that of a Dutch cabinet crowned by a small crest. The inside is lined with green gilt leather decorated with fruit and floral motifs.

Recent changes

On the occasion of the Esnoga's three hundredth anniversary in 1975, members of the congregation donated the carpet in the board room whose central motif is the congregation's coat of arms showing a phoenix rising from its ashes. During the 1970s the mourners room and part of the offices were renovated by D. Verheus.



Interior of the winter synagogue, established in the 1950s in the former auditorium of Ets Haim. The 'pautas' with the names of the members of the seminary are still on the walls.

Page 64:
Charter accompanying the gift by the members of the congregation to commemorate the Esnoga's 250th anniversary. The illustrations portray: the arms of the congregation, the pelican; the exterior of the Esnoga; Chacham Aboab; the silver Chanukah menorah; the tebah; the arms of Amsterdam and the Esnoga entrance, above which are the windows which have since been replaced by wooden panels. The illustrations are interspersed with ornamental vases and branches – the design on the gilt leather screen which was later lost. (1925. Ink and gouache on paper, Portuguese Congregation, Amsterdam)

Since 1991 the Mendes Coutinho house has been the main entrance to the whole complex. This was the home of the 'shammes' (sexton) and is named after the last shammes to live here. Sal Mendes Coutinho was in the Resistance during the Second World War. After the closure of the Esnoga in 1943, services continued to be held in secret in his house on the Nieuwe Keizersgracht.

The walls of the entrance gate contain stone tablets presented to the congregation in the 1950s and 1960s (see Appendix A). They come from buildings demolished in the Jewish quarter which surrounded the Esnoga before the Holocaust.

The Esnoga and the Holocaust

When war threatened in 1939, the Dutch



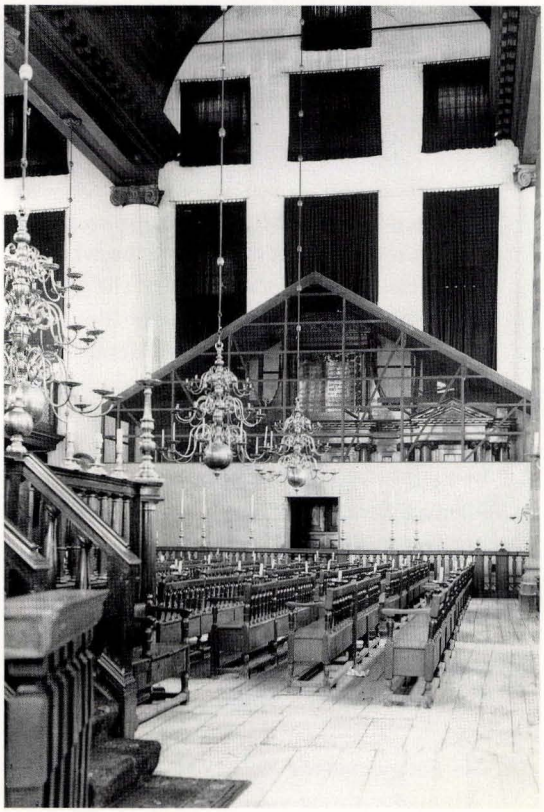
Interior of the mahamad meeting room. The carpet portrays the phoenix, the original emblem of the congregation and now once again the Esnoga's symbol. The carpet was donated by the congregation to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Esnoga in 1975. The pelican, symbol of the congregation for some two hundred years is portrayed on the back of the middle chair and above the mirror.

government informed the board of the congregation of the measures it would take to protect the synagogue, a national monument, in time of war. The plans were drawn up by the inspector for the protection of works of art, Dr. J. Kalff. They were implemented under the direction of the architect J. Roodenburgh. The attic was sprayed with fire-resistant paint and covered in a material that could withstand incendiary bombs. A complete fire-extinguishing system was installed and two fire escapes were constructed at the rear. The special protection for the hechal consisted of a wall several metres high of boxes filled with sand. On top of this was a framework of fire-resistant netting. The government bore the costs of this work on condition that the Talmud Tora congregation would provide fire watchers in time of war. Thanks to the cooperation of the Amsterdam fire brigade and air raid defence service, the congregation was able to do this.

In February 1941 a rumour spread that Dutch fascists planned to set fire to the Portuguese Synagogue. To prevent an attack with dynamite like the one carried out on the synagogue in Zandvoort, the hatch leading to the vaults was nailed down.

In the winter of 1941 Hauptsturmführer Aus der Fünten paid a visit to the Esnoga in connection with his plan to use it as an assembly centre for deportations. It was found to be an unsuitable location. A member of the congregation who was present pointed out to Aus der Fünten that it would be virtually impossible to black out the large windows. In the end the Hollandse Schouwburg was chosen to be the assembly centre.

Worship in the Esnoga continued until 26 May 1943. In June 1943 the fire watchers concealed the remaining ornaments, a copy of the register of births and deaths and the silver objects belonging to Dotar in a channel running behind the cornice above one of the architraves supporting the vaulted ceiling. They then blocked access to the channel. The congregation's fire watch was maintained until 2 February 1944, when the task was taken over by Gentiles. It was the presence of fire



The hechal during the Second World War, with boxes of sand and wire netting to protect it against fire.

watchers throughout the war which ensured that the synagogue was not damaged during the famine winter of 1944-1945. People living in the area did take all the wood from the Ashkenazi synagogues across the square, and from all the other Jewish buildings in the neighbourhood that were no longer in use.

The scrolls of the law, mantles and jewellery which were in the Esnoga at the start of the war remained there throughout the Occupation. In 1939 various precious possessions had been put in safe deposits at one of the city's large banks. These were emptied by the Germans. The stolen objects included the brown gilt leather wall covering which was hung on the walls of the Esnoga on holidays, three pairs of silver finials and the so-called 'oath sefer', the scroll of the law on which oaths were taken in the synagogue. Other objects were given to the Rijksmuseum on loan. It is extraordinary that all the brasswork was preserved, since brass was a vital raw material for the munitions industry. The building may have come through the war unscathed because the Germans intended to turn it into a museum of the lost Jewish culture after their victory. It has been said that they had similar plans for the very old Altneuschul in Prague and the synagogue in Carpentras. However, the entire book collection of the Ets Haim library in the synagogue complex was taken to Germany, where most of it was recovered after the Liberation.

On 9 May 1945 the Esnoga was reopened with a special service held jointly with the Ashkenazi community. Addresses were given by Chief Rabbi J. Tal and the acting president of the congregation, D.S. Rodrigues de Miranda. The Ets Haim library marked its reopening on 30 November 1947 with an exhibition of religious jewellery.

Some years after the war the original 17th-century coat of arms of the Talmud Tora congregation was restored to its rightful position. The arms adopted for unknown reasons in 1743, which showed a pelican feeding its young with blood from its breast, were replaced. Because the Portuguese congregation has come back to

The Esnoga entrance at the start of the service on 9 May 1945.





The reopening of the Esnoga after the Second World War, on 9 May 1945. The Portuguese and Ashkenazi communities held a joint service in the Esnoga, virtually the only synagogue in Amsterdam to escape damage.

life after the Holocaust, it has again adopted its old coat of arms: the phoenix rising from its ashes.

Ets Haim library – Livraria Montezinos

Jaffa Baruch-Sznaj

The Portuguese congregations which had been established in Amsterdam soon after 1600 cooperated in founding the Talmud Tora (Study of the Law) society for religious education in 1616. This seminary provided classes in Hebrew, knowledge of the scriptures, biblical commentaries, the Talmud, Hebrew poetry and Aramaic. It was attended by boys from about the age of five and was divided into classes and levels; the higher courses qualified students as rabbis. In 1637, two years before the 'União' or union of the three congregations, the Ets Haim society was founded. Its main purpose was to provide financial support for students. The Hebrew words 'Ets Haim' mean 'Tree of Life' and the name is derived from Proverbs 3.18. The underlying idea is that the Torah is the wellspring and life-blood of Jewish existence.

One of the first pupils ('Irmãos') at Talmud Tora was Michael d'Espinoza, the father of the celebrated philosopher. Spinoza himself was registered as a pupil at the age of five in 1637, but his name was erased from the records when he was excommunicated in 1656.

Each teacher had at his disposal a 'livraria', a small collection of books for educational purposes. The library developed from these collections and in time it came to share the name 'Ets Haim' with the society and the seminary. The earliest rules of the society, dating from the first half of the 17th century, state that the 'foundation day' of Ets Haim shall be celebrated on the first day of Shabungoth. The Portuguese congregation in Amsterdam still observes this custom.

An inventory drawn up in 1640 shows that at that time the library consisted of 246 works. In the following years the collection grew rapidly, partly because Amsterdam had become an important centre for the printing and selling of books in Hebrew. Prominent members of the community, such as Manasseh ben Israel and Immanuel Athias, took an interest in the growth of the collection. Until 1672 the person in charge of the library was an elected treasurer, but then two official librarians were appointed, each serving for six months in turn. When the Esnoga was inaugurated in 1675, Ets Haim was moved into a number of classrooms in the buildings surrounding the synagogue.

The effects of the general economic decline in the 18th century were felt in Ets Haim, and the growth of the collection slowed down. But books were still acquired through bequests and donations, and purchases at auction. During this period the librarians came from successive generations of the Belinfante family.

The first printed catalogue appeared in 1808, followed by revised editions in 1843 and 1858. These catalogues are of little bibliographical value, but they do tell us that at that time the collection contained some seven thousand volumes. The library continued to function alongside the seminary and was administered by the Board of Governors. The five members of this Board dealt with such matters as finance, administration, collecting fees from students or giving them financial support ('aspakah'), and the appointment of teachers. We know from the Board's archives, for example, that in 1853 'Rubi' (the title for a teacher) Aron Vaz Dias received 70 cents per teaching hour for religious education, and Rubi Bassan 76 cents per hour for algebra and geometry. From the second half of the 19th century secular subjects such as Dutch, modern languages, mathematics, geography and history were added to the curriculum.

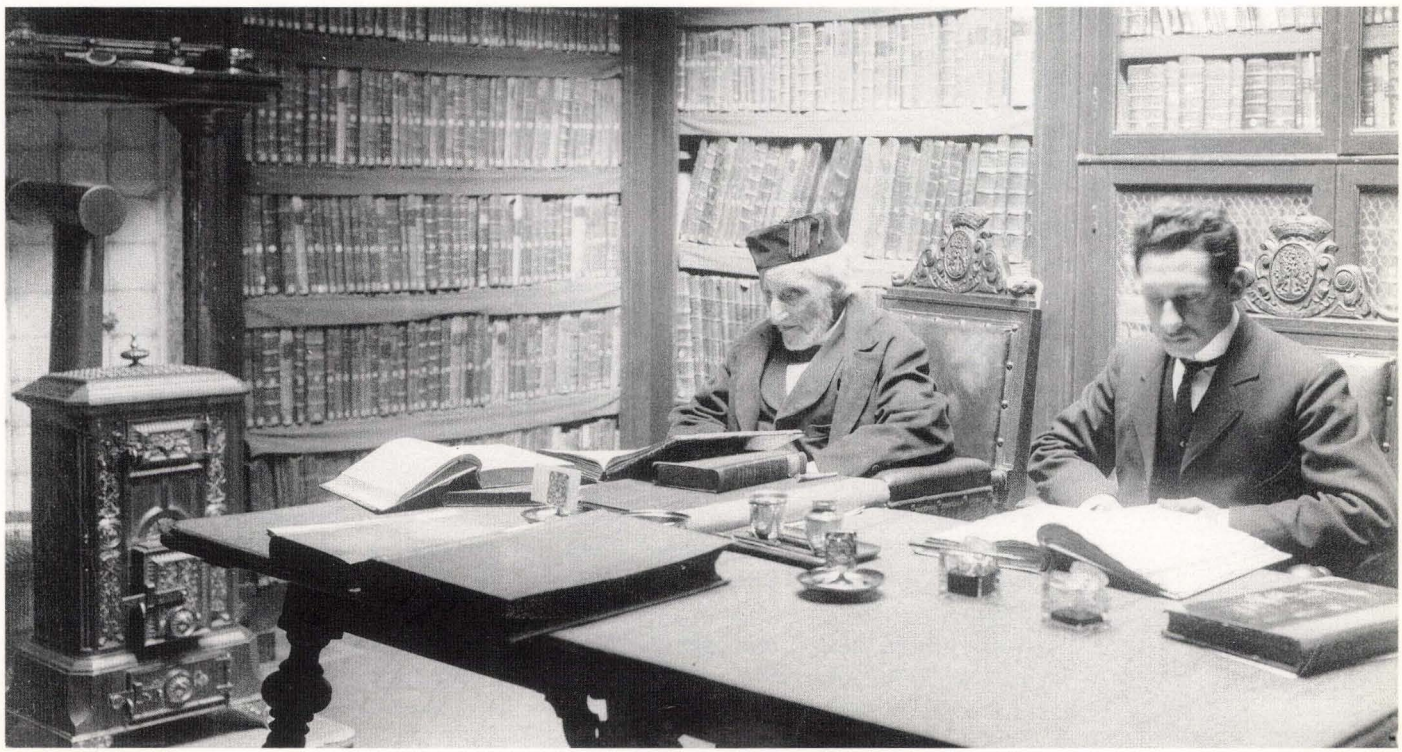
In 1866 David Montezinos (1828-1916) became the librarian of Ets Haim. Other members of his family had held this post before him. Montezinos had received his religious education at the Portuguese-Jewish Seminary, i.e. Ets Haim, and had a deep interest in Hebrew bibliography. He took a scholarly approach to running the library. Apart from buying books and manuscripts for Ets Haim, he assembled an impressive private collection. In 1889 Montezinos informed the governors that he wished to offer *'his entire library, both Hebraica and Judaica (...), as an informal gift to the Portuguese Jewish Seminary Ets Haim'*. One of his conditions was that the library should be open to visitors for two days a week, a requirement which is still met today. In 1891 Montezinos's exceptional and very valuable collection became part of the library, and the words 'Livraria Montezinos' were added to its name. At this time two tile tableaux painted by J. Sequeira, one of the governors, were installed in the library. One bears the name 'Livraria Montezinos' and the other has the coat of arms of Ets Haim: a tree bearing fruit flanked by two lions.

After his death in 1916, Montezinos was succeeded by Jacob da Silva Rosa (1886-1943), who did impressive bibliographical work while also writing numerous historical articles and a good deal of journalism. The handwritten card index which he produced still forms the basis of the Ets Haim catalogue. At the outbreak of the Second World War he hid the rarest works. The rest were taken to Germany by the Nazis in 1943 to be kept at the 'Alfred Rosenberg Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage' in Frankfurt am Main. After the planned extermination of the Jewish people had been completed, it would still be possible to study Jewish culture at this institute. Like most other members of the community, Jacob da Silva Rosa was killed in a concentration camp. Soon after the war ended, American troops

found most of the Ets Haim collection in Offenbach. It was brought back to its original place in the buildings around the Esnoga in Amsterdam. The library was reopened in 1947.

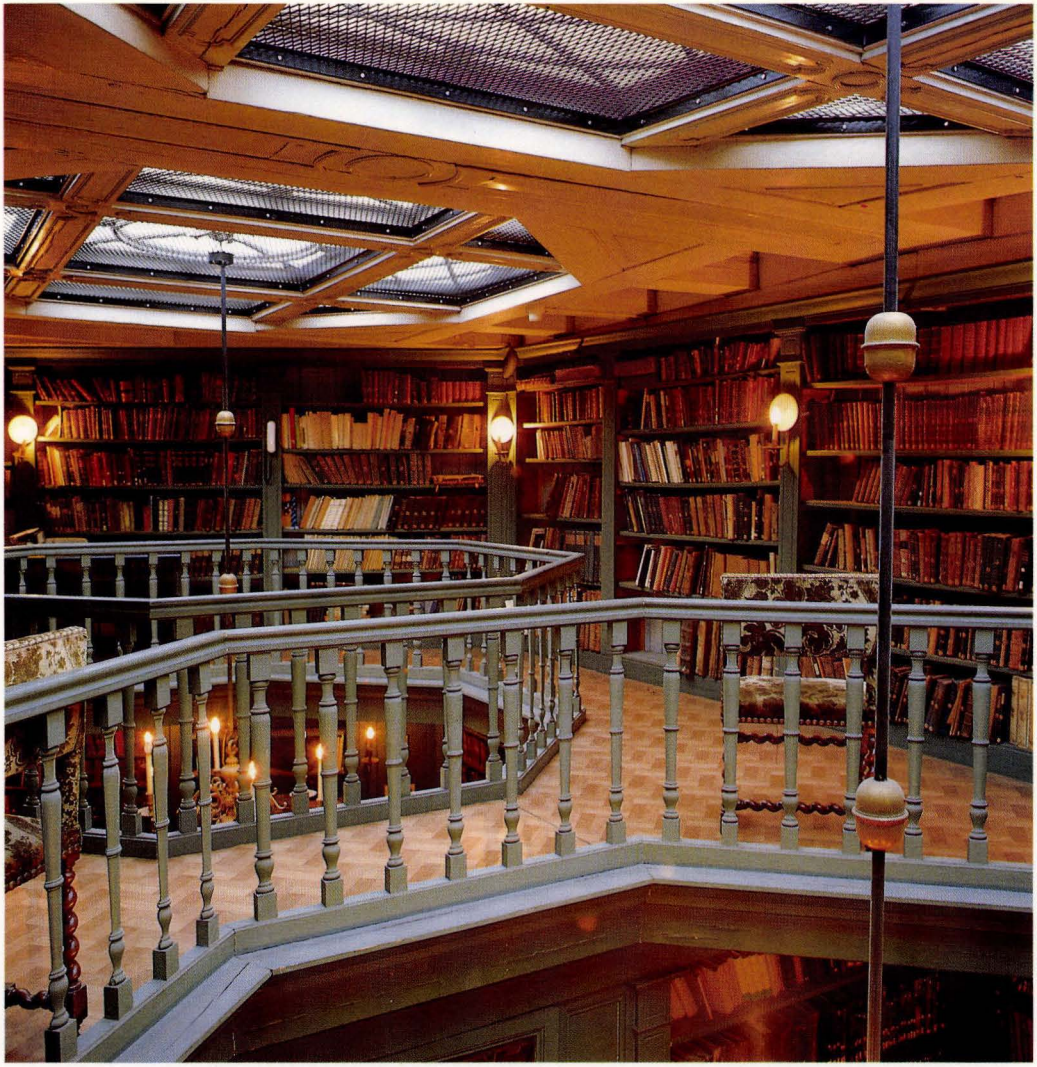
The present-day visitor to Ets Haim can still see the library in its historic setting. From the courtyard the library is reached through the so-called 'winter synagogue' established in 1953 in the largest classroom of the seminary. On the way one passes an imposing safe over one hundred and fifty years old on which the name and year of foundation of the seminary are hand-painted. On entering the library, every visitor is struck by the splendid surroundings. The books line the walls of two large rooms and an oak spiral staircase leads to the upper floor. Daylight enters through domes in the roof and reaches each room through a large octagonal opening in the floor above. There are balustrades around these openings, so the upper floor seems like a gallery. The rooms are also lit by electric wall lights and chandeliers. The sea-green colour used for the book-cases and woodwork adds considerably to the striking effect.

The Ets Haim collection, which is



Interior of Ets Haim in 1916. The last two prewar librarians were: left, David Montezinos and next to him, Jacob da Silva Rosa.

The upper floor of Ets Haim library.



entirely devoted to the Portuguese congregation and related subjects and housed in a building belonging to this congregation, has made the library a unique and world-famous institution. The twenty thousand works now in the collection are divided into two broad categories. The first is Hebraica, i.e. works in Hebrew such as Bibles, Talmudic literature, liturgical works, books of law, theological treatises, grammars, responsa (rabbinical questions and answers) and prose. The second is Sephardica, a term covering everything to do with Sephardi Jews in general and Portuguese Jews in particular. This includes historical works, sermons, linguistic studies, religious books, plays and poetry – all in various languages, with much in Spanish

and Portuguese. The collection also contains reference works, programmes of special synagogue services, occasional prayers, theses and catalogues. The manuscripts are held on loan by the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem; they can be consulted in Ets Haim on microfilm. Some of the Ets Haim archives, together with documents of the Portuguese community, are kept in the Municipal Archives of Amsterdam. So even beyond the confines of the library, the greatest care is taken to preserve the collection. Books are still bought to add to the collection and donations are regularly received.

Officially, the library is still an educational establishment, but activities in this field are now very restricted. There is, however, great interest in Ets Haim. The groups served are, firstly, the members of the Portuguese and sister communities and rabbis and, secondly, Dutch and other scholars studying a wide range of subjects from history to musicology, and languages such as Spanish, Portuguese and Hebrew. Ets Haim maintains contacts with related institutes and makes regular contributions to national and international exhibitions.

Like all other libraries, Ets Haim faces a range of problems, large and small: financial restrictions, and partly as a result limited opening hours, acidification and an incomplete catalogue. At present the greatest threat to the books is the poor condition of the building, which means among other things that proper climate control is impossible. However, action is being taken to thoroughly restore this part of the Esnoga complex as well. This care for the building and the collection will ensure that for centuries ahead Ets Haim will continue to be a priceless source of research material, a place with a special atmosphere and a world-renowned historic monument.

From rimmonim to Persian rugs

Ceremonial objects from the collection of the Portuguese-Jewish Synagogue

'May those who now form our Congregation learn to cherish the traditions of the Snoge.'

Julie-Marthe Cohen

This wish was expressed by Jaap Meijer in his introduction to the *Volledige handleiding voor den voorlezer der Portugeesch Israëlitische Gemeente te Amsterdam* ('Complete guide for the cantor of the Portuguese-Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam') which he included in the *Encyclopaedia Sefardica Neerlandica* in 1949. This guide, *'containing the order of prayers and present-day customs and ceremonies in the aforesaid synagogue'*, had been compiled in 1892 by Oëb Brandon, the cantor at the time. It was based on the earliest such guide, written in Portuguese by Josuah Jesurun Pinto in 1758, and on a 19th-century guide in Hebrew.

Brandon's guide sets out detailed rules for the use of the synagogue's ceremonial silver and textiles. Some of the objects in his guide no longer exist; some of those which do survive have been worn out by intensive use. Others still adorn the synagogue on the prescribed days. By studying these artefacts we can learn about the typically Sephardi and Amsterdam-Sephardi customs which were and still are in use among the Portuguese Jews. We can also obtain a clearer picture of their cultural life in Amsterdam. Some synagogal objects of particular interest are described below.

One of the oldest items in the collection is a Torah breastplate made in Amsterdam between 1603 and 1609 by Leendert Claes van Emden. This is the oldest breastplate of this type known to date. It is rectangular and has an oblong frame in the middle to hold sliding interchangeable labels bearing the names of festivals. The breastplate is hung over the Torah on a chain and can be used to show the festival for which a particular Torah scroll is intended. The labels belonging to this breastplate have been lost. However, *'Rosh Chodesh'* (New Moon, the beginning of a new month) is engraved on the breastplate at the spot where the labels were slid in.

It is surprising to find this breastplate in a Sephardi synagogue since its use is restricted to the Ashkenazi tradition. But if we go back to the beginnings of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam, the reasons for its presence will become clearer. The first Portuguese New Christians who settled in Amsterdam

and wanted to practise Judaism were no longer familiar with Jewish law. So they took lessons from Uri ha-Levie, a rabbi from Emden, the place the maker of the breastplate originally came from. Tradition has it that it was Urie ha-Levie who brought a scroll of the law which is kept to this day in the Esnoga. One of the first New Christians to be given instruction according to the Ashkenazi ritual was Jacob Tirado. In the early years of the 17th century he offered the Torah breastplate to the community as a gift. 'Tirado's plate', as Brandon calls it, is still used on Rosh Chodesh.

In his guide Brandon also mentions a large number of Torah mantles, which he refers to by their colour or the name of the donor. They are used to cover the parchment scroll on which the Torah is written. The mantles in the Portuguese Synagogue are outstanding because of the beauty of the materials and the embroidery. The Portuguese Jews ordered the fabrics from Spain, Italy and France. Sephardi mantles are not stiffened at the top and are flared towards the bottom. There is usually a long fringe of gold or silver thread one third of the way down and along the bottom edge. Some of the mantles of the Esnoga have three vertical embroidered bands which are alternated with brocade. The vertical bands often display the monogram of the donor, sometimes framed by a coat of arms. On one mantle there is an embroidered coat of arms and monogram half way up below a crown with five pearls and five fleurons. In this way a custom was continued which originated in Spain and Portugal. After their conversion, some New Christians adopted the arms of the noble family whose name they were to bear. Those who later settled in Amsterdam, and returned to Judaism, went on using their arms, proud as they were of the social position they had held on the Iberian peninsula. The Sephardis also had their arms or monograms embroidered on the corners of their silk 'talliths' (prayer shawls). In the Ashkenazi tradition the corners of prayer shawls are not decorated.

Monograms or coats of arms are also found on 'rimmonim' (finials), the ornaments placed on the top ends of the two rods of the Torah scroll. The synagogue has two rimmonim decorated with the arms of the Teixeira de Mattos family, a quartered shield with a lion at top left and bottom right and a tree at top right and bottom left. These rimmonim are shaped like towers, and finials of this type were often inspired by contemporary church architecture. In 17th-century Holland rimmonim were usually made by Gentiles, since the guilds were closed to Jews. The tower-shaped rimmonim developed from another type which resembled a pomegranate. Indeed, the Hebrew word 'rimmonim' literally means 'pomegranates'. This shape can still be clearly seen in some of the silver rimmonim of the Portuguese Synagogue. In the Jewish tradition the pomegranate is associated with wealth and abundance.

Several pairs of finials in the Portuguese Synagogue are made of silver filigree, which is white in colour. This makes them

Left to right:
* *'Royal Crown' (Torah crown), Wijnand Warneke, Amsterdam, 1775. Silver and gilt, h. 30 cm.*
* *Rimmonim bearing the arms of the Teixeira de Mattos family, Johannes Schouten, Amsterdam, 1768. Silver and gilt, h. 48.5 cm.*
* *Torah mantle, French (?), c. 1700. Satin, chenille, silver and gold thread, h. 101 cm.*
* *'Imperial Crown' (Torah crown), Wilhelmus Angenendt (?), Amsterdam, 1775. Silver and gilt, h. 21 cm.*
* *Torah mantle with monogram, Spanish or Italian (?), late 17th century. Velours, gold, silver brocade, pearls, gold thread and cantille, h. 96 cm.*
* *Rimmonim with filigree. Silver and gilt, h. 36 cm.*
* *Rimmon for on the scroll when lifted, acquired in 1751-1752. Silver and gilt, h. 29 cm.*





Tallith with monogram and family coat of arms, France, c. 1780.
Silk, gold thread, gold spangles, gold band, 222 x 132 cm.



very suitable for use during the celebration of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, days on which white vestments, mantles and other objects in the synagogue express the penitence and purity of spirit which form the central themes of these festivals.

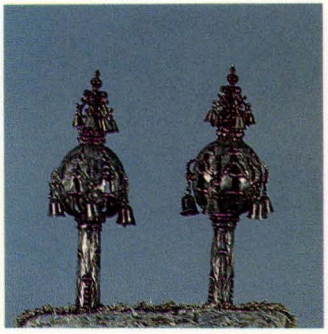
Another special type of finial is used when the Torah is lifted up to be shown to the congregation. This takes place before the reading begins and after the Torah ornaments have been removed and the scroll has been unwound to at least three columns of text. Showing the Torah is an honorary task carried out by the 'levantador', the Portuguese name for this specially appointed member of the congregation. Before it is raised, the so-called 'til-rimoniem' (lifting rimmonim) are placed on the Torah. These are smaller and lighter than the ordinary rimmonim to avoid making the Torah too heavy. For if the scroll falls the whole congregation must fast for a day. The use of these special rimmonim is not part of the Ashkenazi tradition.

A crown may be placed on top of the Torah scroll instead of rimmonim. This form of decoration was very popular in Spain in the 14th century. The two oldest crowns from the Portuguese Synagogue, a 'royal' and an 'imperial' crown, are part of the permanent exhibition at the Jewish Historical Museum, but they are still used in the synagogue for the Simchath Torah and Kol Nidre services. They were purchased in 1775, after two similar crowns had been stolen from the synagogue. This theft came as such a shock that a reward of one third of the value of the crowns was offered for their return,

Page 76, upper right:
'Tirado's plate' (Torah breastplate), Leendert Claes, Amsterdam, 1603-1609. Silver, 23.5 x 26 x 2 cm.

Rimmonim for on the scroll when lifted, shaped like pomegranates. Silver, 30 x 13 cm.





Below, left:
The ornaments from the photograph on page 76.

unfortunately to no avail. The purchase of two new crowns so soon afterwards was probably because of the celebrations in that year marking the synagogue's centenary.

Crowns, finials and mantles are the most conspicuous Torah ornaments. The 'ponteiro', the pointer used for readings from the Torah, is often kept under the mantle. One of the ponteiros, made of gold and inlaid with diamonds, was presented to the mother community in Amsterdam by the Portuguese community in London to mark the bicentenary of the Portuguese Synagogue in 1875. As Brandon's guide explains, this ponteiro is used at every Barmitzvah, at the three Pilgrim Festivals (Succoth, Pesach and Shabungoth) and on Shabbath Nachamu, the day on which each year the inauguration of the Snoge is celebrated. The Ashkenazi custom is to hang the pointer over the mantle, but the Sephardis often slide it between the folds of a binder. This is a long piece of material that is wound tightly round the scroll before the mantle is put over it.

One of the binders from the Portuguese Synagogue is Ashkenazi. Ashkenazi binders were often made from the linen or silk cloth on which a newborn boy was laid during circumcision. The cloth was cut into three or four pieces which were then sewn together end to end. On the long strip thus produced a standard pattern of words was embroidered: '(name of the child), *son of* (name of father), *born under a lucky star on* (day of the week, date, month, year), *may he grow up in the Law, to Good Works and to the Marriage Canopy*'. Decorative motifs were sometimes added, or a text to do with the boy. The binder from the Portuguese Synagogue was very probably taken to pieces at one point, because the order of the words does not correspond with the standard pattern. The text reads: '*Law and for Good Works. Born under a good star on the eve of day one 19 Cheshvan 5367* (19 November 1606)'. Sadly, the piece with the name of the boy on it is missing so we do not know for whom this binder was made. The early date makes its origin very interesting. Theoretically, it is possible that it was made in Amsterdam in 1606 by one of the Ashkenazis who had settled in the city at the beginning of the century. But they may also have brought it from their native country.

In the Sephardi tradition binders are made from both new and used special fabrics. They may or may not have words on them. The Portuguese Synagogue has a remarkable example, without words, made from a Bengali coverlet. After this part of India had been conquered by the Portuguese in the 16th century, coverlets were made specially for the Portuguese export market. They can be recognised by the tambour-work in yellow, the natural colour of the wild silk used. The binder belonging to the Portuguese Synagogue is decorated with hunting scenes showing archers on horseback or on foot pursuing birds, deer and other game. During a recent restoration of the binder, a piece of chintz was found which had been used to patch a hole in the interlining of the embroidery. The chintz was partly hand-painted and partly block printed with flower and foliage motifs; it was made in India in the 17th century. Exactly the same fabric turned out

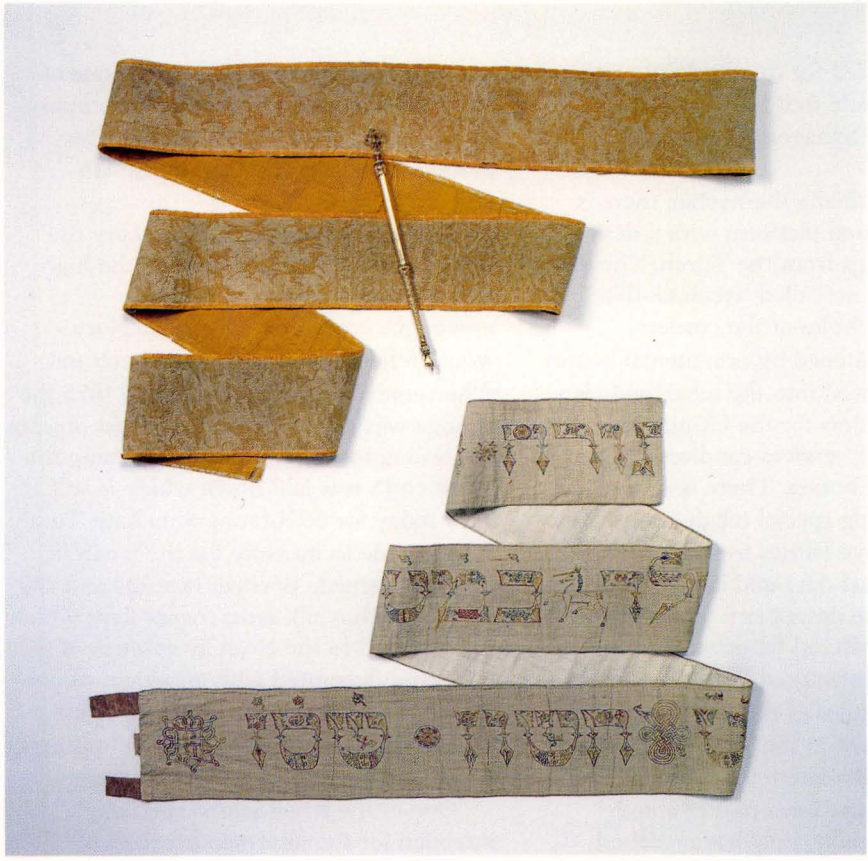
to have been used for the inside-out lining of a Torah mantle that is in the hechal of the Portuguese Synagogue.

In the Esnoga, facing the hechal, there is the tebah, a raised platform with a desk used for readings from the Torah. The desk is covered by a so-called 'tebah cloth', which has four holes at the corners. This cloth is fastened by ornamental bosses which are screwed into the tebah and also function as holders for the lifting rimmonim. At evening services candlesticks are used instead of bosses. There is an ancient tradition of using special tebah cloths made of very expensive fabrics from Europe or overseas for feast days and anniversaries. Brandon's guide describes a tebah cloth made of embroidered fabric which may have been manufactured in Venice. Ceremonial textiles of this type were made by Jewish women in the Venetian ghetto around 1600. The fabric for this cloth, which would have been part of something else originally, may have reached Amsterdam as a result of the contacts in the early 17th century between its Portuguese Jews and the Jews in Venice. At that time the Venetian community played an important part in the organisation of the young Sephardi community in Amsterdam. The 'Venetian' tebah cloth is known as the 'harlequin' cloth because of its brightly coloured fabrics and the tassels along the edges. The sides of the cloth are decorated with flower, foliage and pomegranate motifs in embroidery and in green and blue appliqués of velvet and silk. The cloth is used in the synagogue at Purim, the occasion for joyful celebrations to commemorate the rescue of the Jews from Haman. He was the counsellor of the Persian king Ahasuerus who plotted to murder the Jews in the 5th century BCE.

In the course of the 17th century the Portuguese community reached the high point of its prosperity. A majestic synagogue could be built whose glory would reflect the economic and cultural achievements. For the opening in 1675 the Esnoga was adorned with the finest objects. According to tradition, at the opening the tebah cloth was laid down which is still used today for celebrating Simchath Torah. It was made to measure for the tebah in Persia. It is made of silver brocade and silk velvet, and has silk satin corner flaps which are attached to the cloth by rosettes of gold braid and decorated with appliqués of gold thread. The Portuguese Jews spared no expense when it came to such an important occasion as the opening of their Snoge.

One of the tebah cloths specially intended for the intermediary days of Succoth is the 'silk Persian', an exceptionally fine carpet made in the 17th century in the court workshop of Shah Abbas I at Isfahan. These 'Shah Abbas' carpets can be recognised by the medallion in the centre and by the absence of human or animal motifs. The Portuguese Synagogue's carpet, which has a magnificent silky gloss, is in excellent condition despite centuries of use.

The Far East is represented by a 19th-century Chinese silk cloth. This so-called 'yellow cloth' is used during the celebration of Pesach. When it is placed on the tebah, the embroidered design of thick bamboo



From top to bottom:
** Binder made from a Bengali coverlet, 17th century. Cotton and silk, 13.5 x 330 cm.*
** Ponteiro made by G. Angell (?), donated by the Portuguese congregation of London, London, 1875. Gold and diamond, 33.5 cm.*
** Ashkenazi binder, Amsterdam or Eastern Europe (?), 1606. Linen, cotton and silk, 14.5 x 243 cm.*



Lining of a Torah mantle made from the same chintz used for the lining of the 'Bengali' binder, India, 17th century. Cotton. (Detail)



'Harlequin cloth' (tebah cloth), Venice (?), late 16th century. Velours, satin and silk, 234 x 165 cm.



Tebah cloth used for the inauguration of the Esnoga in 1675, Persia, late 17th century. Silk velvet, satin silk, silver brocade, silver thread, silver band, gold thread, gold-braid rosettes and chintz (lining), 241 x 170 cm.

stems rising up from rocky outcrops is seen on its side from the cantor's point of view. This shows clearly that this kind of cloth was chosen in the first place for the beauty of its colour, composition and technique, and then made suitable for the use intended by adding four holes for the corners of the tebah.

In the course of time tebah cloths have also been made for non-Jewish festivals and anniversaries. This was done, for example, when a member of the House of Orange, which has traditionally been on good terms with the Portuguese Jews, paid a visit to the synagogue. In 1883 a special tebah cloth with matching desk cloth and 'sefer cloth' (used to cover the Torah) was made to mark the visit of King William III. Appropriately enough, the background colour of these cloths, to which lace is attached, is orange. The lace itself dates from about 1500. The pieces come from various coverlets which were made in Italy with exceptional care, precision and patience. The tebah, desk and sefer cloths are still used on the shabbath on or after the Queen's Birthday.

The 'orange' sefer cloth is the only one still used for a special day. Sefer cloths are now chosen for their colour, to match that of the tebah cloth. As can be seen from Brandon's guide, in the past there were other cloths for special days, such as the 'Sarphati cloth'. This was a gift of Dr. Samuel Sarphati (1813-1866), a prominent figure responsible for the founding of various institutions, among them the Paleis voor Volksvlijt (Palace of National Industry) and the Nederlandse Crediet- en Depositobank. The cloth was formerly used on the first day of Shabungoth as well as on other occasions. What makes it unusual is that it has embroidered on it the letters '*K*(ahal) *K*(adosh) *T*(almud) *T*(ora)' (i.e. the Holy Congregation Talmud Tora, as it was officially known), and the coat of arms used by the congregation for two centuries showing a pelican feeding its three young. The Hebrew words in the middle of the cloth mean *'Worship the Lord in holy adornment'* (cf. I Chronicles 16.29). Barely visible are the small stars above the Hebrew word for 'adornment'. They indicate the numerical value 5609 (1849), a playful reference to the year in which Dr. Sarphati presented the cloth to the community.

A sefer cloth is laid over the Torah scroll when it is not being read from. The reading of the Torah is done by the chazan on behalf of the one called – a member of the congregation or a guest – who stands beside him on the tebah. When the chazan has finished reading the part for that person, the Torah is rolled up and covered with the cloth until the following reading on behalf of the next person called. This covering is done by the 'president', generally an officer of the congregation (the 'service parnas'). This is why the cloth is also sometimes known as the 'president's cloth'.

Going to the tebah for a reading ('subiren') is an honorary function for which an offering is made. The amount of the donation and the charitable cause are often announced in Portuguese by the cantor. There are other honorary functions in the Portuguese Synagogue for which

donations are made. They include opening the Ark ('abrir') and carrying and accompanying ('accompanhar') the Torah scroll. The offerings were traditionally used for many purposes, among them Terra Santa (the Holy Land, nowadays Israel), the Ets Haim seminary (the school/library), Tzedaka (charity in general) and Fabrica (maintenance of the synagogue and ornaments). Other charitable causes, such as Cautivos (for ransoming slaves), have been abandoned with the passage of time.

Collections for a good cause are also held on fast days and at weddings. So-called 'tazzas' or shallow wine cups are used to collect the money. Four tazzas with Portuguese inscriptions were donated by Jahacob Abenijacar, also known as Pimentel, in the year 5444 (1683-1684). The community's oldest tazza, which is in fact rarely used, is made of silver gilt and decorated with an eagle. It was probably made in Spain in about 1580. This tazza and a 'Cohanim laver' are the only surviving 16th-century objects which may possibly have been brought from the Iberian peninsula by the Portuguese Jews. The Cohanim laver is Portuguese and dates from as early as 1550. It was given to the synagogue by Abraham and Sara Cohen de Ereira. Abraham Cohen de Ereira, who came to Amsterdam from Morocco in 1600, became well known as the author of two kabbalistic works written in Spanish.

A Cohanim laver is used together with a ewer for washing the hands of the Cohanim before the priestly blessing is pronounced. Cohen de Ereira's laver shows the priest's hands giving the blessing. They are surrounded by bands depicting hunters and many kinds of real and mythical animals. Most communities outside Israel carry out the priestly blessing only on holidays, but among the Sephardi Jews in Amsterdam it is done weekly, provided a 'Cohen' is present. The 16th-century Cohanim laver is still sometimes used for this.

The continuing use today of this 16th-century Portuguese object is a testimony to the long and flourishing Sephardi tradition which originated on the Iberian peninsula and was carried on and enriched in Amsterdam with the coming of the Portuguese Jews. It was passed on from Amsterdam to other Sephardi communities established in The Hague, London, the New World and elsewhere. The Portuguese Jews of Curaçao, for example, not only took the Snoge as the model for their own synagogue, but also had ornaments such as finials and mantles made in Amsterdam. In 1721 they even ordered a copy to be made in Amsterdam of the Tirado breastplate, a sign of Ashkenazi influence during the early years of the Portuguese community.

So the wish expressed by Jaap Meijer that the traditions of the Snoge should be cherished seems to have been fulfilled up to now, and far beyond the confines of Amsterdam.

'Silk Persian' (tebah cloth), Isfahan (Persia), late 17th century. Silk, silver thread, cotton base and leather, 287 x 176 cm.



Below, right:
Tazza donated by Jahacob Abenijacar, Haarlem, 1642. Silver, 12 x 15 cm.

Tebah cloth with bamboo-stem design, China, 19th century. Silk and twisted silk, 243 x 184 cm.



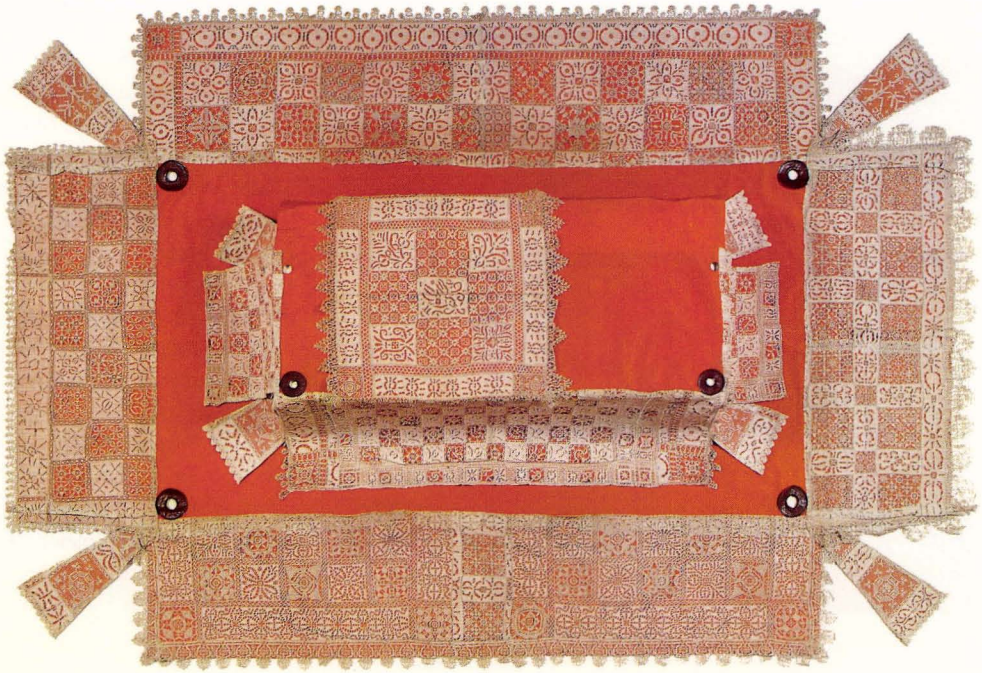




* *The Esnoga's oldest Torah scroll, according to tradition, brought by Uri ha-Levie.*
* *'Sarphati sefer cloth', Holland, 1849. Linen, chenille, twisted and floss silk, twisted gold, cantille, silver thread, gold thread rosettes, gold and silver thread, 61.5 x 69.5 cm.*
* *The Esnoga's oldest tazza, Spain (?), 1580. Silver and gilt, 16 x 19 cm.*



The Esnoga's oldest Cohanim laver, possibly brought from Portugal, Portugal, 1550. Silver and gilt, 4 x 49 cm.



'Orange' tebah cloths, Holland, 19th century. Lace: Italy, c. 1500. Silk, linen, cotton, leather, 248 x 165 cm (tebah cloth), 178 x 99 cm (lectern cloth), 58 x 58 cm (sefer cloth).







Appendix A

Gable stones in the entrance porch

The entrance porch of the Esnoga is decorated with six commemorative stone tablets given to the Talmud Tora congregation in the 1950s and 1960s and placed in the wall. The tablets are from various houses and buildings that once stood in the Jewish area surrounding the synagogue.

The north wall:

The rectangular tablet with the text *'1792-Sa'adat Zekenim-5552'* (Support for the Elderly) comes from Rapenburgerstraat 34-36 which was demolished in about 1930. Sa'adat Zekenim was a society which administered an old-age pension scheme. The building belonged to Isaak de Veiga Henriques from 1781 to 1794.

The white-marble tablet with the two-line Hebrew text and the year 5531 (1771-1772) was originally part of the façade of Waterlooplein 55-57, the site of A. Mendes Coutinho's printing house.

The narrow rectangular tablet with the text *'Lishuatechah kiwiti H(ashem) – Op U Saligheyt Waght ick O heer'* ('I have waited for thy salvation O Lord'; Genesis 49.18) was obtained from Zwanenburgwal 38, which was demolished in 1936. Isaac Mocado originally had the tablet placed in 1657. After having been lost for a number of years it was rediscovered and donated to the congregation in 1952.



The south wall:

The tablet depicting *'Abrams Offerhande'* (Abram's Sacrifice – or The Binding of Isaac) came from Lange Houtstraat 55, a building near Waterlooplein which was ransacked by Amsterdammers in March 1945 during the famine winter.



The Renaissance-style tablet illustrating Jacob's Dream shows the four angels mentioned in the Old Testament; here the ladder has been turned into a stairway. The tablet was once part of the façade of Rapenburgerstraat 183, built by Jacob Pereira in 1696. The house was demolished in 1959.



The cartouche with voluted embellishments is dated 5422 (1662-1663) and quotes Psalm 16, verse 8: *'Sheviti H(ashem) lenegdi'* which means *'I know the Lord is with me'.* The tablet was part of the façade of Waterlooplein 13, built in 1661-1662 for Abraham and Isaac Pereira and demolished in 1928. In 1937 the tablet was placed in the wall of the City Orphanage in Sint Luciënsteeg, and was subsequently donated to the congregation in 1953.

Appendix B

The Edict of Expulsion, 31 March 1492

Ferdinand and Isabella (...) send their greetings to Prince Juan, our most cherished and most beloved son, the Infantes, and to the priests (...) and to the Jewish communities in the city of Avila and to all other cities, towns, and villages in our kingdom and in our possession.

We have been informed that within our kingdom there are evil Christians who have converted to Judaism and who have thereby betrayed our holy Catholic faith. This most unfortunate development has been brought about as a result of the contacts between Jews and Christians. In an edict that we issued twelve years ago, in 1480, we proclaimed that the Jews who dwell in the cities, towns, and villages in our kingdom and in our possession not be allowed to live alongside our Christian subjects. We therefore ordered that the Jews be allowed to live only in the Jewish quarter and other isolated locations, with the hope that this separation can correct the situation. Furthermore, because of our concern, we ordered the initiation of an inquisition, or investigation in our kingdom and in all areas in our possession. As you know, this investigation has been carried out for the past twelve years and many sinners have been uncovered through the diligence of the inquisitors, church officials and members of the laity. Thanks to the inquisition, we have all learned of the great damage that has been caused to Christians through their participation, contact and even conversation with the Jews. It has been conclusively proven that the Jews have sought, by all the various means and methods at their disposal to destroy our holy Catholic faith, to cause faithful Christians to abandon that faith, and to corrupt these Christians by drawing them towards the harmful Jewish faith. In order to carry out their plans, the Jews are constantly seeking to persuade Christians that it is not at all difficult to observe the precepts of the Jewish faith and that the only true faith is that of the Jews. We have abundant evidence of this behavior of the Jews, as can be seen in the many declarations and confessions of the Jews themselves and of those who have been corrupted and tricked by the Jews. This entire situation has caused great damage to our holy Catholic faith.

We have decided that no further

opportunities should be given for additional damage to our holy faith. We have decided to protect those whom God has seen fit to guard up to now and to protect those who have faltered in their faith, who have corrected the error of their ways and who have been returned to the bosom of the Church, our holy mother. We have decided to protect these Christians because we know how weak human character is and how dangerous are the crafty and unscrupulous methods used by Satan against us. We have come to realize how precarious will be the position of all Christians in our kingdom unless we remove the principal danger to our holy faith. We have therefore decided to carry out the expulsion of all the Jews in our kingdom. When a crime is committed by someone who belongs to a certain group, it is fully justified that such a group be dispersed or erased from the face of the earth or be made to suffer. It is fully justified that those who are of little importance in this world be made to suffer in order to safeguard those who are of great importance, and, furthermore, it is justified that the few must be made to suffer in order to safeguard the many. And it is justified to banish from our towns and villages those who corrupt the good and moral life of these towns and villages by contagion and by infectious contact that can harm others. For small matters that can cause damage to the state, individuals are expelled. It therefore stands to reason that an expulsion should be carried out since this crime is the most horrendous, dangerous and infectious of all possible crimes.

Thus, we hereby order the expulsion of all Jews, both male and female, and of all ages, who live in our kingdoms and in all the areas in our possession, whether such Jews have been born here or not, irrespective of the manner by which they have come to our kingdoms and to any of the areas in our possession. These Jews are to depart from our kingdoms and from all the areas in our possession by the end of July, together with their Jewish sons and daughters, their Jewish servants and their Jewish relatives. This decree is to affect all Jews, both adults and children, irrespective of age. It is furthermore ordered hereby that no Jew may dare to return and dwell in the former areas of Jewish residence in our kingdoms and in all the areas in our possession. Nor shall Jews be permitted to pass through our kingdoms and through all the areas in our possession en route to any destination. Jews shall not be permitted in any manner whatsoever to be present in any of our kingdoms and in any of the areas in our possession. Any Jews who do not obey this decree and who are found in any of our kingdoms and in any of the areas in our possession or who come to these kingdoms or areas under any circumstances whatsoever shall be sentenced to death and shall have their property confiscated by our court and by the royal treasury. Furthermore, let it be made clear that such sentencing shall be imposed for the very act of entering any of our kingdoms or any of the areas in our possession and that the offending party will be executed without the benefit of a trial, without the presentation of a court decision, without any prior declaration whatsoever.

We hereby declare that any person in any of our kingdoms, irrespective of his or her social position and status shall not provide hospitality or shelter to, shall not house or protect, whether overtly or covertly, any Jew, male or female, after the above date of expulsion, namely, after the final day of the month of July. From that date forward until the end of time, no person in our kingdoms shall provide hospitality or shelter to, shall house or protect, whether overtly or covertly, any Jew, male or female, in any of said person's residences, on any of our lands, in any part of our kingdoms or in any part of the areas in our possession, with the penalty for violating this order to be confiscation by our court and by the royal treasury of said person's possessions, including all of the persons protected by said person, and including all fortresses and all manner of property that are transferable by inheritance. Furthermore, any persons guilty of extending such assistance to the Jews will lose all royal privileges.

We hereby authorize the Jews, male and female, to remove from our kingdoms and from the areas in our possession all of their property and possessions by sea or by land, with the stipulation that they are not to remove gold or silver or minted coins or paper currency or, with the exception of goods, any other item whose removal is forbidden in accordance with the laws of our kingdoms.

We have also issued orders to the councils, courts of law, royal officials, caballeros, escuderos, clerks, and good townspeople of the city of Avila and of all other cities, towns, and villages in our kingdom and in our possession, as well as to all of the vassals who are our subjects and to all natives of our kingdoms, to the effect that all clauses of this edict are to be obeyed without reservation or qualification, that all help and support are to be given to those who are in need of such help and support, with the penalty for failing to extend such help and support to be the confiscation of the violator's property and possessions and the termination of said person's position by our court and by the royal treasury.

In order to ensure that this edict becomes known to all and in order to ensure that no one can claim ignorance of said edict, we hereby order that our edict be proclaimed in all public areas and in all public squares of this city and of all major cities, of all villages, and of all other areas of settlement in the jurisdiction of the Cardinal, and that said proclamation be made by the local herald and in the presence of the notary public.

No other persons shall be authorized to proclaim this edict.
Issued at Granada, on the 31st of March, 1492.
I, the King. I, the Queen.
I, Juan de Colomba, Chief Secretary to the King and Queen, our masters, recorded the above as ordered.

Glossary

Ab, the fifth month in the Jewish calendar.
Ark, see **hechal**.
Ashkenazis (Hebrew: Ashkenazim) – Jews originally from central and eastern Europe.
Ban, see **cherem**.
Barmitzvah (lit. Son of the Commandment) – the religious age of majority reached on a boy's thirteenth birthday. Boys usually take part in the service for the first time on the shabbath after reaching the age of thirteen.
Beth Israel, House of Israel – the third congregation of Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, founded in 1618.
Beth Jacob, House of Jacob – the first congregation of Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, founded between 1600 and 1610.
Bimah, the Ashkenazi word for **tebah**.
Chanukah, Festival of Dedication – the celebration of the rededication of the Second Temple in the age of the Maccabees. The festival lasts eight days; each day one more candle is lit on the Chanukiah.
Chazan, the cantor of a Jewish congregation, the person who leads the synagogue service.
Cherem, the ban – the sentence of excommunication passed on Spinoza prohibited all Jews throughout the world from having any contact with him.
Chuppah, the canopy under which bride and bridegroom stand during the wedding ceremony.
Cohanim, the direct descendants of Aaron, the first High Priest. Before the Destruction the Cohanim conducted the Temple services; today in the synagogue they pronounce the priestly blessing and are the first to be called up to the Torah reading.
Cohen, singular of **Cohanim**.
Day of Atonement, see **Yom Kippur**.
Diaspora, the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world – and the fact that many Jews live outside Israel.
Dome of the Rock, the domed octagonal shrine that stands on the traditional site of the former Temple in Jerusalem. The site of this 7th-century mosque is also holy to Islam.
Dotar, short for the Santa Companhia de Dotar Orphas e Donzellas, a society founded in 1615 by the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam to provide dowries for poor and orphaned young girls.
Esnoga, the Portuguese word for synagogue.
False messiah, a person who falsely claims to be the Messiah.
Halachic, concerning the 'halachah', Jewish laws and customs.
Hechal, the Sephardi name for the Holy Ark – the Ark is built into or against the synagogue's eastern wall and contains the Torah scrolls.
Kabbalah, Jewish mystical teaching.
Kol Nidre (lit. All the Vows) – the evening service at the start of Yom Kippur, so called because of the opening words of the first prayer which is chanted three times.

Kosher, food which is fit to be eaten according to Jewish law.
Levites, the descendants of the tribe of Levi, who were the attendants in the Temple. Today they assist the Cohanim in the synagogue when they wash their hands before pronouncing the priestly blessing.
Mahamad, the governing body of a Sephardi synagogue – the college of parnassim. The word 'mahamad' is also used for the chamber where the governors meet.
Messiah, anointed with oil and inspired by God to come to the aid of the Jewish people. The Messiah's arrival will introduce a new age in which good will be rewarded and evil punished, in which the Jews who live in exile will return to Israel and all humankind will accept the supremacy of God.
Messianism, the belief and hope in the coming of the Messiah and the Messianic Age.
Mikveh, a ritual bath, a prerequisite for any congregation, mainly used for ritual purification by women after menstruation.
Ner Tamid, the eternal light – the lamp that burns continually in the synagogue, symbolising the light of Torah and the seven-branched candelabrum that shone in the Temple.
Neve Shalom, Home of Peace – the second congregation of Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, first mentioned in 1612.
New Christians, Jews and descendants of Jews of the Iberian peninsula who, from the late 14th century, converted to Christianity, mostly by force. New Christians were also often referred to as Marranos, originally a term of abuse.
Parnassim, the governors of a Sephardi synagogue.
Passover, see **Pesach**.
Pesach, Passover – the Spring festival celebrating the exodus from Egypt.
Purim, Feast of Lots – the celebration of the delivery of Persian Jewry from the hands of Haman, as described in the Book of Esther.
Rabbi, a Jewish religious teacher and leader.
Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year – the start of the ten days of repentance, the Days of Awe, which end with Yom Kippur.
Sephardis (Hebrew: Sephardim) – Jews originally from Spain or Portugal.
Shabbath, the day of rest (Saturday) – the seventh day of the week should reflect the seventh day of Creation, when the Creator rested.
Shabbath Nachamu, the Shabbath of Comfort – the shabbath following the fast of the 9th of Ab, the day of mourning for the destruction of the First and Second Temple.
Shabungoth, Feast of Weeks (pronounced 'Shavuoth' by Ashkenazis) – the festival celebrating the Giving of the Law on Mount Sinai and a day of thanksgiving for the harvest.
Simchath Torah, Rejoicing of the Law – annual celebration of the completion of the cycle of Torah readings and the start of the new cycle.
Snoge, the name generally used for the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam.
Succoth, the Feast of Tabernacles – a festival commemorating the period when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and lived in frail booths. The first two days are followed by five intermediate days and the festival ends with a final celebration.
Tallith, a prayer shawl worn during worship, with fringes on the four corners to remind the wearer of the Creator.
Talmud Tora, The Study of the Law – the name adopted by the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam when they united to form a single congregation in 1639. The name was also used by the society for religious education founded in 1616.
Tanach, the 24 books of the Old Testament.
Tebah, the Sephardi name for the podium from which the service is led and the Torah read. In Sephardi synagogues the tebah is placed towards the back, while in Ashkenazi synagogues it is in the centre.
Torah, the first five books of the Tanach.
Yiddish, the language spoken by Ashkenazi Jews; a mixture of German and Hebrew.
Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement – an entire

day of fasting when Jews pray to God to forgive their sins.

Zionism, the struggle for a Jewish national homeland and the conviction that this homeland should remain and that Jews should settle there. This movement first took hold around 1900 and was the political counterpart of the age-old longing for a Jewish homeland in Zion – i.e., Israel.

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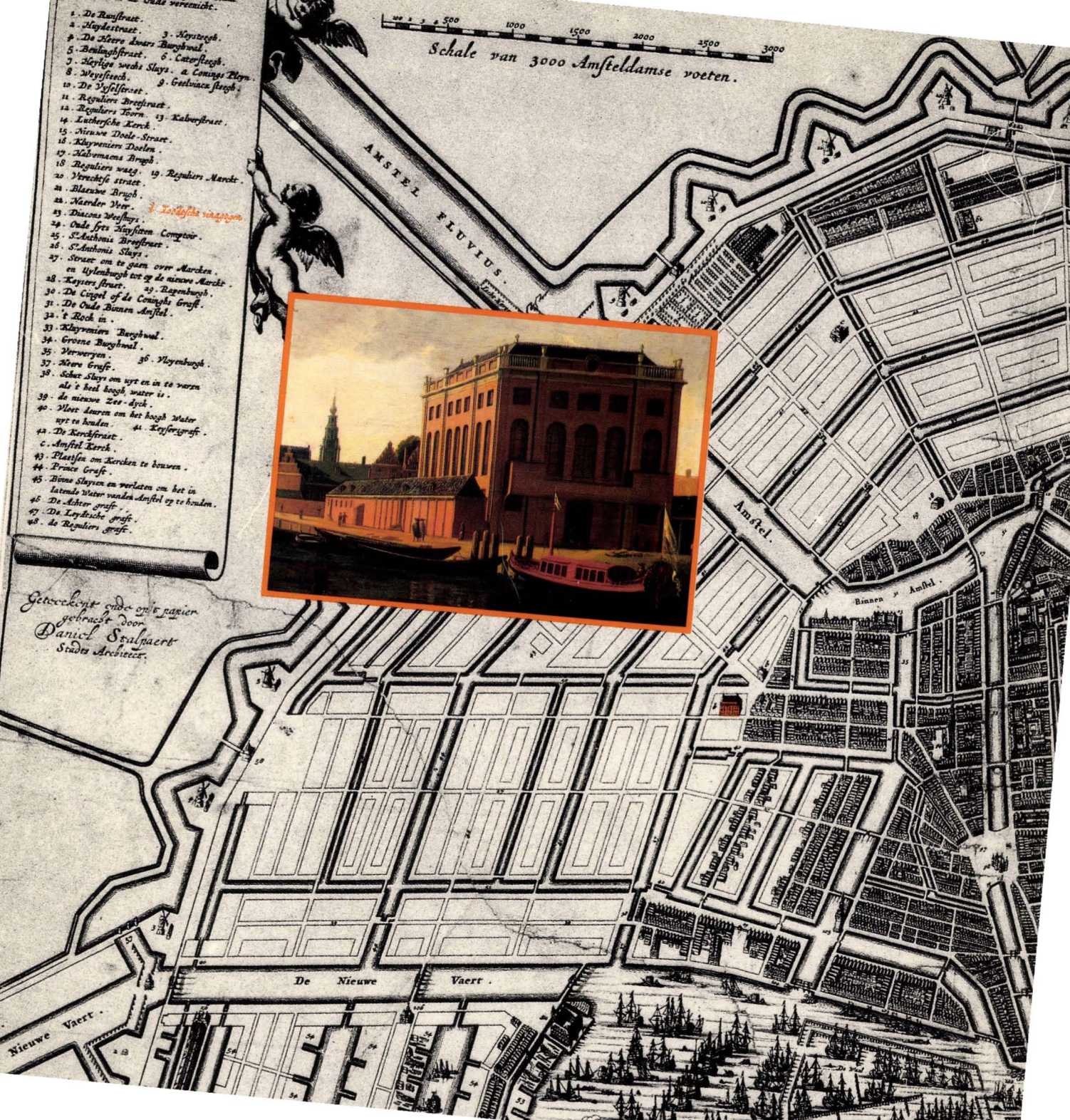
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Schale van 3000 Amsteldamse voeten.
AMSTEL FLUVIUS.
Amstel.
Binnen Amstel.
De Nieuwe Vaert.
Nieuwe Vaert.
Getrocknt onder op't papier gebracht door Daniel Stalpaert Stadts Architect.