The Portuguese Jewish Community in Amsterdam
During the First Century of the Dutch Republic

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NEH Seminar For School Teachers, 2013, London and Leiden
The Dutch Republic and Britain
National Endowment for the Humanities
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I. Introduction

In the late 16th and throughout the 17th centuries, Portuguese New Christians and crypto-Jews made their home in Amsterdam. This migration followed the creation of the Union of Utrecht in 1579, which unified the northern provinces of the Netherlands. Within the Union’s by-laws, article 13 ordained that, “everyone shall remain free in religion and that no one may be persecuted or investigated because of religion.” Thus, the Dutch Republic became a haven for men and women, especially of Jewish heritage from the Iberian Peninsula, fleeing religious persecution. However, there wasn’t true religious toleration in the Dutch Republic yet; though, often local authorities within Amsterdam ignored the activities of the growing Portuguese Jewish population for economic reasons. However, despite their relative ‘freedom’ in comparison to their experience in Spain and Portugal, the Portuguese Jewish community acted for over a century in a way that avoided bringing unwanted attention to it. There was a desire to conform, more or less to the expectations of the Dutch authorities so that what happened to the Jews in Spain and Portugal would not be repeated in the Dutch Republic. Often, this meant self-regulation by applying punishments upon those not conforming to the Portuguese congregation, even sometimes resulting in excommunication.

II. Terminology

Portuguese Jews: A way not to be identified with Spain, which was often at war with the Dutch, and collectively viewed as conversos from the Iberian Peninsula.

Sefardic Jews: Jews of Portuguese and Spanish heritage.
Conversos: New Christians, officially converted to Catholicism, many still practiced Judaism secretly

New Christians: Descendants of forcibly baptized Jews from Spain and Portugal (Bodian, Liberty of Conscience)

Marranos: Converts to Catholicism but not faithful Catholics, a disparaging term often used by Jews who didn’t convert toward those Jews who did convert

Herem: The ban that ostracized a ‘rebellious’ member of society (Bodian), used 36 times 1622-1683 and threat of it 55 times

Crypto-Jews: Secret adherence to Judaism; Often resulted in governments still trying to “convert, harass or expel Jews” (Bodian). The term crypto-Jew is also used to describe descendants who maintain some Jewish traditions of their ancestors while publicly adhering to other faiths

Anusim: forced to convert against their will

Judaizer: (verb or noun) Jewish conversos to Catholicism who practiced Judaism secretly and also those Jews who did not convert

Re-judaize: Conversos or descendents of Conversos who embraced Judaism. Usually a program, that introduced and established rabbinic norms among men and women who had been cut off from the Jewish world for generations (Bodian).

Parnassim: Elected wardens of the Jewish community, but were autocratic since there was no real check on their power. Even when a rabbi argued that only a rabbi had the right to excommunicate, the ban was still valid for a day.

Mahamad: A disciplining body, which resembled the Dutch Reformed church council that sought to maintain public morality and good order (Bodian, Liberty of Conscience). Thus this group essentially fit into Dutch society like a glove.

Nação: The nation
III. Origin of Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam

Spain and Portugal

For centuries, Jews flourished in Spain, culturally and politically. However, as King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella were determined to create religious unity in Spain, first Jews were encouraged to convert to Catholicism and then they were expelled in 1492. For those Jews abjuring to Catholicism, the _conversos_ or New Christians, their sincerity (sometimes rightly so) came under scrutiny and the Inquisition was adopted in 1478. Of the 200,000 Jews living in Spain at the time of the expulsion, approximately 100,000, who refused to convert, fled to Portugal in hopes of forging a new life.

Unfortunately for the Jews now living in Portugal, their freedom was short-lived. As a result of the impending marriage between King Manual of Portugal and the daughter of King Ferdinand and Isabella, in 1496, King Manual gave the Jews of Portugal 11 months to leave. However, he recognized the economic importance of his Jewish population and he developed a plan to keep them in Portugal and at the same time save their souls by converting them. On March 19, 1497, Portuguese officials announced that all children ages 4-14 were required to appear for forced baptism the following week. When the baptismal day arrived, some parents smothered their own children to prevent the forced conversion (Roth, p. 57). King Manual prevented the Jews from leaving by the assigned deadline and the Jews were declared the king’s slaves and forced to convert. This forced conversion was known as the “General Conversion” (Roth, p. 60),

Movement to the Netherlands

New Christians began settling for trade purposes, primarily, in Antwerp in the early 1500s. Many New Christians maintained economic ties with New Christian family and friends still in Spain and Portugal, but also with those family members who fled to North Africa, Turkey, and other parts of the Mediterranean as a result of the Spanish expulsion. Whereas those who escaped Spanish and Portuguese control often never gave up their Judaism, or re-Judaized,
the New Christians lived amongst relatively liberal tolerance policies in Antwerp until the 1540s. New Christians were not free to reclaim their Jewish heritage, as Antwerp was now part of the Spanish Empire since the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V’s inherited much of the Low Countries, and the New Christians (even a few living openly as Jews) were persecuted (Huussen Jr., p. 46).

Amsterdam

The New Christian settlement in Amsterdam was a result of King Philip II’s reconquest of the southern Netherlands around 1585. However, there is no clear evidence of New Christians in Amsterdam until the 1590s. The number was quite small and despite universal knowledge that they had Judaism in their background, this was essentially ignored, as they did not attempt to express their Jewish heritage outwardly. Besides commercial prospects, the great appeal of settling within the newly created Dutch Republic was the clause in the Union of Utrecht’s charter that “guaranteed freedom of conscience for the inhabitants of the participating ‘sovereign’ provinces” (Israel, pp 202-203). Article 13 of the Union of Utrecht treaty is often interpreted as supporting religious tolerance or at least “conscience” in the Dutch Republic. The first actual documentation referring to the settlement of New Christians “as a group in Amsterdam appears to involve a resolution, made on September 14, 1598, by the magistrate in Amsterdam, concerning the citizenship of the so-called ‘Portuguese merchants’. Assuming that these New Christians of course were actually ‘Christian’, these merchants were to be allowed to acquire citizenship if they so desired” (Huussen, *Legal Position* pp.19-41).

IV. Religious Tolerance or Acceptance

The idea of true religious freedom was not an actual reality following the Treaty of Utrecht. Though, the notion of ‘private belief or conscience’ where one could worship freely in the privacy of his home seemed to be the accepted interpretation (Bodian, *Liberty of Conscience*, p. 2). The official religion of the Dutch Republic in the early 17th century was the Reformed Church and there was no
clear condoning of worshipping openly outside of this Church during the first decade and-a-half of the 1600s. Whenever the city leaders did find out about individual Jews living in Amsterdam, they essentially turned a blind eye. However, as the commercial success of the Jews blossomed by the turn of the century, little by little, religious toleration and eventually civil rights were extended to them.

Despite the growing acceptance of the Jewish presence in the Dutch Republic at the turn of the century, basic aspects of Jewish life were often still denied to the small Portuguese Jewish population. For example, following an attempt to establish a cemetery in Amsterdam in 1602, the Portuguese Jews ultimately obtained a plot of land for the cemetery 50 km from Amsterdam. Twelve years later, desiring a cemetery closer or in Amsterdam, the second cemetery, Beth Haim was established, but it was still 31 km from Amsterdam in Ouderkerk. This cemetery is still in use today with over 27,000 graves, the oldest dating to 1616.

During the first two decades of the 17th century, the Portuguese Jews were relegated to the status of non-Calvinist Christians in Amsterdam. As early as 1611, Hugo Grotius, the great Dutch legal and liberal scholar, began commenting on the Jewish presence in the Dutch Republic. He still reflected the common notion in the Dutch Republic that those not of the Reformed Church should not have “just freedom of conscience, but freedom of public worship – as long as that worship did not contradict the fundaments of Christian belief.” A few years later as new religious regulations were being developed by the government, “he recommended
granting Jews the right to practice Judaism only in the privacy of their homes. Thus, even Grotius originally advocated an exceptional and specific restriction for the practice of Judaism” (Bodian, *Liberty of Conscience*). According to Bodian, the government did not adopt Grotius’ suggestion, most likely because it seemed prudent to leaders of Amsterdam that the New Christians or Portuguese Jews were the key bridges to Spanish trade during the period of the Twelve Year Truce between Spain and the Dutch Republic. During this period, there was also a new influx of Portuguese Jews to Amsterdam bringing additional new members to the still small community. Even well into the 17th century, New Christians, who still played important economic and financial roles in Madrid and other parts of the Iberian Peninsula, found themselves once again persecuted and often resented for their economic prowess. Thus, more fled to Amsterdam where their addition to the Jewish Portuguese community with their financial skills helped shift the existing community’s mercantile focus to indirect investment in the Amsterdam stock exchange. (Swetschinski).

There are a number of examples cited by many historians, which exemplify freedom of conscience and attempts to placate Dutch citizens but not drive away Jewish settlers. One incident occurred in 1603 when an Ashkenazi rabbi and his son were arrested for “receiving stolen goods and circumcising adults.” The two were eventually released when it was determined that the circumcisions were of Portuguese Jews, rather than Dutch men who converted to Judaism. Of course, this situation created great anxiety for many years within the Jewish population in Amsterdam. The Jewish community came to believe that if Judaism was practiced “discreetly,” the community would become acceptable to the government (Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, pp. 20-22). Likewise, when the Portuguese Jews attempted to build a somewhat clandestine synagogue in 1612, the plans for the building were met with approval by the city government; but an extreme backlash by the public, particularly the Reformed Church leaders, eventually threatened the project. However, the local authorities were able to placate both sides by
allowing a Christian to own the building and only rent it to the Jews, while at the same time calming the Amsterdam public by declaring that anyone from the Portuguese Nation was prohibited from living in or using the building for public religious purposes. Once again this can be seen as an example of the tortuous arrangements that allowed private worship for Jews (Bodian and Swetschinski). The 1612 synagogue eventually became a public synagogue in 1639.

There was an attempt following the acquisition of the Ouderkerk cemetery and the building of the 1612 synagogue to specifically regulate the Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. On November 8, 1616, representatives of the ‘Jewish Nation’ were issued regulations (this was the one and only set of regulations issued by Amsterdam toward Jews) that instructed them to “refrain from any spoken or written attacks against the Christian religion; not attempt to convert Christians to Judaism or to circumcise them; to have no sexual intercourse with either married or unmarried Christian women, including prostitutes.” And, according to Bodian, even these regulations were not strictly enforced. Only three years later, in December 1619, the States of Holland determined that the “voting member cities of the Assembly would be free to make its own regulations for Jews, with the proviso that towns were not to compel Jews to wear any distinguishing marks. The city magistrates were, however, free to assign Jews to a special closed residential quarter” (Huussen, pg. 8).

Clearly, by the 1620s, the Portuguese Jews were experiencing relative freedom in the Republic and this was quite different from the outright anti-Semitism and strict religious and social regulation faced by Jews elsewhere in Europe. Thus, it is no surprise that many Ashkenazi Jews moved to Amsterdam from Germany during this time. However, their community usually lived separately from the Portuguese Jewish population due to cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences. The legislation ultimately enacted “recognized the Jews as separate, autonomous ‘nations’, but at the same
time prohibited their full participation in urban economic life (Huussen, p. 8). Thus, the Portuguese Jews were able to prosper economically, especially in international trade in which they faced no restrictions.

V. Dutch Intolerance

Before evaluating the intolerance within the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam, one must understand the role of intolerance within Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic as a whole during the 17th century. For many, this contradicts the traditional notion of 16th and 17th century religious freedom often taught in schools. As seen in the earlier sections, it was initially really only public freedom of worship that was prohibited for those not of the Reformed Church in the Dutch Republic and thus from the late 1500s and early 1600s other religious groups had to essentially hide their religious practices.

However, there was another aspect of Dutch intolerance during the first century of the Dutch Republic, and that intolerance was connected to the Calvinist effort to create a moral society and control social deviation. This restraint within society was analyzed by Jonathan I. Israel throughout chapter 28 on “Freedom and Order” in *The Dutch Republic*. Israel begins the chapter by evaluating the greater freedom and independence enjoyed by women in the Dutch Republic than in other European nations. He argues that the chief reason for this greater freedom was that there was a high degree of social discipline in the Republic. Much of this was tied to the fact that social life in Dutch towns was heavily regulated. Since there was a much greater urban population in the Republic than in other parts of Europe, and because of the close proximity of one’s neighbors, it was difficult to carry out crimes, such as wife-beating, and public drunkenness without the scorn of one’s neighbors. The relative safety of women in Dutch towns thus allowed them what appeared to outside observers as greater freedom for women in public. In addition, to ensure adherence to social regulations, towns were supervised by neighborhood watches, which, “saw it as their task not only to guard their quarter, preventing robbery and crime, but also to enforce decency and apprise the town’s schout, magistrates, or consistory of unacceptable behavior… thus it was taken for granted that little of what went on in a neighborhood would escape the notice of the neighborhood watches” (Israel, p. 680). In addition, the Dutch were surprisingly (considering the legalization of such activities as marijuana and prostitution in the Netherlands today) less indulgent of what was viewed as permissive or
inappropriate social behavior. Israel points out, that institutions such as brothels were acceptable “as long as they stayed seemingly innocuous and caused no disturbance” (Israel, Pg. 683). This attitude seems somewhat similar to the experiences of the Catholics with their “hidden-churches” and the Portuguese Jews who hid their Jewish heritage in public during the early 17th century.

Israel also discusses the strength of social discipline exercised by the leaders of the Reformed Church. Since Calvinism was a religion that frowned upon public indecency, it is no wonder that the Reformed Church took whatever opportunities available to make examples of those who broke their ‘social norms’ (Israel, pg. 685). The result was that people were ultimately so concerned with their reputation, social standing, and even their salvation, that they attempted to do whatever seemed required to get back into the good graces of the Church. A period of great anxiety for the Portuguese Jews developed in 1618 during the Counter Remonstrance agitation against relatively more liberal Remonstrant strain of Calvinism inspired by Armenius. The hardline Calvinists talked of the expelling the Portuguese Jews. Fortunately, this never happened. Though, as the 17th century progressed, the orthodox Calvinists promoted a ‘Further Reformation’ movement that sought to exert even more control over the Christian population in order to “curb immorality and misbehavior” (Israel, p. 692). As a result, the Portuguese Jews, surrounded by the examples of social control of the Christians around them, also enacted more self-regulation to ensure so that they would not wear out their welcome in the Dutch Republic.

VI. Judaism, Portuguese Crypto-Jewish Style and Jewish Intolerance In Amsterdam

As the Portuguese Jewish population grew during the early 17th century, a conundrum developed about their Jewishness. For the New Christian interested in re-judaizing, or the crypto-Jew who was not yet ready to declare himself as a Jew, the problem was that the ‘Jews’ that had settled in Amsterdam had to essentially relearn Judaism.

Clearly, the Portuguese Jews were comfortable enough with their own economic and religious position in Amsterdam to establish a public synagogue in 1639 and they also adopted societal and moral regulation for their community within the city. Even amongst themselves, the Portuguese Jews in the Republic did not have an easy time. In addition to the restrictions within the community imposed by the Jewish leadership, the Portuguese Jews had to essentially determine who they really were as Jews. For two centuries they had hidden their Jewish heritage
and had been without a synagogue, a rabbi, and all the other trappings that characterized Jewish communities.

The synagogue that emerged in 1639 was the result of the merging of three Portuguese synagogues. In our own time, the term synagogue suggests that a synagogue is solely a building. However, in earlier centuries the term synagogue often meant a congregation. The early congregations were: Beth Jacob 1597 (House of Jacob) and Naveh Shalom 1608 (Abode of Peace), and Beth Yisrael 1618 (House of Israel). In addition to natural growth, which led to the establishment of additional congregations, conflict developed within the Naveh Shalom, which led to a split resulting in the establishment of Beth Yisrael. It was the arrival of Jews from other countries that led to a desire for a closer union and the brought the three congregations to join together. It was Naveh Shalom’s building that was used as a place of worship and the new combined congregation became known as Kahal Kodesh (Talmud Torah). This remained the center of the Portuguese community until the building of the great Esnoga Synagogue, which was dedicated in 1675.

The Judaism of the three joined congregations developed into a unique style of Spanish and Portuguese Judaism. Although often referred to as Sephardic, due to their Iberian heritage, the Portuguese Jews do not reflect the characteristics of those Sephardic communities established throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East following their expulsion from Iberia.

Essentially the Portuguese Jew had to reconstruct the structures of normative Judaism, after generations of sustaining a covert, hybrid, or a minimal Jewish identity (Sutcliffe, p. 418). As hundreds of conversos attempted to re-Judaize and adopt a Jewish way of life, they often encountered a crisis of identity that conflicted with the typical Talmudic-rabbinical tradition that they had not been exposed to. It makes sense that aspects of Judaism were forgotten, between the various Iberian expulsions, inquisitions, and banning of communal institutions. According to Bodian, the Portuguese crypto-Jew had to eventually draw knowledge solely from the Bible, as
there was often little or no rabbinic leadership available. Surprisingly, historians have found that many aspects of traditional ritual matters were often not missing in crypto-Jewish practice, even though there was no Biblical basis for them (Bodian, *Portuguese Nation*, p. 68). Bodian suggests that “rabbinic controversies…. must have seemed hard to take seriously in an environment in which one’s parents had to be buried in churches and churchyards, mezuzahs and sukkahs were out of the question, and the major problem about circumcising a baby boy was whether to do it at all” (p. 69). In order to re-embrace Judaism, the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam had to “import” rabbis to help rebuild their community. More often-than-not, Sephardic rabbis were preferred. Yet, despite the appearance of Sephardic rabbis, the Portuguese Jew was skeptical of rabbinic law and authority. It is no wonder that Jewish Amsterdam produced skeptics such as Spinoza.

By the mid-17th century, the Reformed Church was cracking down on immorality and indecency within the Christian population. Likewise, the Portuguese Jewish leadership followed their example. Understandably, as a peripheral minority within Amsterdam, and lacking political power, the Portuguese Jews had to prove that they were worthy of the liberty granted them by the magistrates (Bodian, p.75). So, what evolved was a desire to create a certain public image that would give the Dutch authorities no reason to complain and thus they developed a governing structure much more strict in its observance than the actual Portuguese Jewish community was at the time. It was probable, that many went along with the imposition of strict moral regulations, since they were now in much better circumstances than their ancestors had experienced in Spain, Portugal and elsewhere in Europe. In essence, the leadership believed that they needed to indoctrinate and educate those who had little knowledge of Judaism and to create a uniformity of moral and religious practice.

VII. Examples of Jewish Intolerance

Following the example of European Ashkenazi communities, the Portuguese Jews identified their community leaders from their economic elite. Most often, those of great wealth were chosen as the *parnassim*, an oligarchy that ruled over the community. The *Mahamad*, which was a council of elders of the community and its membership, included the *parnassim*. The overall desire by the *Mahamad* was to protect the reputation of the community. Essentially, the *parnassim* were delegated by the Amsterdam magistrates to deal with internal Jewish issues such as feeding the poor and religious conflict. The regulations within the Portuguese Jewish
community varied. At times, the punishment imposed by Mahamad was the Herem, a ban or excommunication from the Jewish community. The goal was to set boundaries to keep the community from perceived transgression and punishments were given to those who violated the established boundaries. In the long run, this would prevent bringing the attention of the Amsterdam authorities down on the community. The Parnassim saw themselves as protectors of the Jewish community and because the Mahamad’s power was viewed as coming from Jewish law, the parnassim had the power to impose the herem.

Religious Regulations

One example of Sephardi regulation came in June 1644, which admonished, “any circumcised Jew who abandons Judaism and goes to a country belonging to Spain or Portugal, or of whom it is known that he committed idolatry somewhere”. The hope here was to deter those members of the congregation, especially New Christians who had not fully embraced Judaism yet, from traveling to Catholic countries where Judaism was still forbidden (Kaplan, p. 43). Another regulation regarding those who traveled to Spain and Portugal and hid their identity and openly practiced Catholicism stated that the person must stand before the congregation and ask for forgiveness. In addition, he could not read from the Torah for four years (Kaplan, p. 44). According to Kaplan, between 1644-1747, eight-five names were listed in the registry of those having to ask for forgiveness following their travels to the Iberian Peninsula. In addition, there was evidence in the registry that the Mahamad of Amsterdam even punished those who returned from places where one could live openly as a Jew, but chose not to.

With the renewal of inquisitions against New Christians during the 1640s and 1650s in Iberia, many more migrated to Amsterdam and brought their wealth, business, and commercial ties with them. Kaplan argued in “The travels of Portuguese Jews from Amsterdam to the ‘Lands of Idolatry’ (1644-1724),” in Jews and Conversos. Studies in Society and the Inquisition that “the severe policy of leaders of Sephardic communities regarding travel to Iberia was clearly contrary to the general economic interests of the Nation. The economic ties with Iberia which often required Jewish merchants to travel there to promote their business, were mainstays of these communities and the source of their political and social power…and on this delicate issue, it appears that religious considerations outweighed all others” (p. 56.)
Social Regulations

The parnassim was very concerned about the non-Jewish Dutch perception of the Sephardim of Amsterdam. They developed an attitude that there must be some type of conformity to what they viewed as “civilized behavior” (Sutcliffe). There was always this desire to make a “good public impression.” For example, in 1640, while in synagogue, Jews were banned from the pounding of the hammer during the reading of the Book of Esther (Celebrates the saving of the ancient Israelites from the Persian king’s chief minister). This was an attempt to clamp down on ‘unruliness’ because the parnassim felt it looked bad and lacked decorum in the eyes of visitors.

Spinoza: an example of an Excommunicated Portuguese Jew

Probably the most famous Portuguese Jew from Amsterdam in the 17th century to be excommunicated was Baruch de Spinoza at the age of twenty-three in 1656. According to the text outlining Spinoza’s excommunication (which he failed to attend), he “failed to mend his wicked ways…daily receiving more and more serious information about the abominable heresies which he practiced and taught…the honorable chachamim [Talmudic scholars], they have decided, the said Espinoza should be expelled and excommunicated from the people of Israel” (Nadler, S., p. 40). There was much more to the document read before the congregation and it ended with a warning to the community, “that no one should communicate with him, neither in writing, nor accord him any favor not stay with him under the same roof nor within four cubits of his vicinity” (Nadler, S., p. 41).

Spinoza did not actually publish anything for another seven years after his expulsion and that was primarily an analysis of René Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy. However, it didn’t help that in 1656 Descartes’ works were banned from numerous Dutch universities. So it is unclear exactly as to what specifically Baruch de Spinoza was excommunicated for and there is no record of the specifics. It is most likely that Spinoza was already speaking publicly about his controversial ideas, which were not actually published for another fourteen years. Supposedly,
Spinoza was teaching “three basic heresies: that ‘God can be conceived corporeally,’ that ‘angels do not exist,’ and that ‘the soul perishes with the body’ (Nadler, A., p. 24).” Essentially, he questioned the divinity of the Scriptures, which, as noted earlier, according to the 1616 regulations that Jews must “refrain from any spoken or written attacks against the Christian religion.” As Nadler explained, the general view of the Jews was that, “the city of Amsterdam officially and explicitly told them to keep their house clean, enforce Jewish orthodoxy, and do not let your affairs stray into ours. This must have left the Jews with a deep sense of insecurity and a very strong desire to be cautious. Thus they insured that they did or permitted nothing in their community that would attract the attention of the Amsterdam authorities and bring down upon themselves any unfavorable judgments” (p. 46). To the Jewish leadership, the various teachings and ideas of Spinoza could be interpreted as an attack on Christianity, and therefore bring down the wrath of Amsterdam’s government on the entire Portuguese Jewish community.

VIII. Conclusion

Thus, in a time of uncertainty, a small congregation of Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, numbering 3,000 at its height, found themselves in a much better social, religious, and political situation than they had lived in during the previous century. For over one hundred years, many Jews in Spain and Portugal embraced Catholicism to escape expulsion or the Auto-da-Fé. Others, outwardly professed Catholicism, but secretly attempted to maintain their Jewish identity behind closed doors. Following the creation of the Union of Utrecht in 1579, the idea of religious freedom seemed a possibility. Thus, gradually the New Christians and crypto-Jews left the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish Netherlands for Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic. There, they were able to flourish economically due to their familial ties throughout the Mediterranean and back in Spain and Portugal.

However, true religious freedom was not yet a reality. For over two decades, Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam attempted to keep their Jewish identity secret. It seemed, though, for the most part, that the Dutch, despite the efforts of many in the Reformed Church, were not interested in persecuting their Jewish inhabitants, since they brought major economic benefits to the Republic and as long as issues of conflict within the Jewish community did not affect the Dutch community, and there was no criticism of Christianity or impropriety between a Jew and Dutch Christian. With these limitations, the community leadership strictly regulated the
Portuguese Jews, often implementing the dreaded herem that could expel them from their community. This threat kept the number of those banned to a small number. As the 17th century progressed, there was more and more acceptance of the Jewish community in the Dutch Republic and they were eventually allowed public worship in 1639. Combined with their Ashkenazi brethren, their contributions to Amsterdam’s culture, society, and economy were numerous throughout the remainder of the century and the two following. Unfortunately, in the 20th century, the religious freedom they had sought four hundred years before, led to the practical decimation of the entire Dutch Jewish population at the hands of the new persecutors, the Nazis.

Works Cited


