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Links in a chain: Early modern Yiddish historiography in the northern Netherlands (1743-1812)

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Publication date
2012

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Wallet, B. T. (2012). *Links in a chain: Early modern Yiddish historiography in the northern Netherlands (1743-1812)*.

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4. Menahem Amelander: Portrait of an Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam Ashkenazi

4.1 *The Jewish early modern age and the character of Jewish historiography*

Benedetto Croce's famous dictum that all history is contemporary history, has become a commonplace, but it fits nevertheless perfectly the history of early modern Jewish historiography.¹⁴⁹ The Amsterdam Yiddish history books and chronicles discussed in this thesis were written in the 'long eighteenth century', a period on the threshold of modernity and long considered to have been the closing of the Jewish Middle Ages.¹⁵⁰ Modernity, in Jewish history, the standard narrative claims, emerged only with the rise of the Haskalah and the change, in the wake of the French Revolution, of the political status of Jews.¹⁵¹ It is thus not coincidental that the few historians who devoted a few lines to eighteenth-century Jewish historiography often classified these history books as being wholly traditional, in that these books followed medieval historical methodology and continued existing models without significant innovations.¹⁵²

Recently, however, historians have proposed to define a 'Jewish early modern age' between the Middle Ages and modernity. Such a definition would not only add a new element for understanding Jewish history better, but bring the field of Jewish history closer to the discipline of European history at large. In the 1960's German and Anglo-Saxon historians, almost contemporaneously, introduced the term 'Frühe Neuzeit', or 'early modern age', as a definition of the period from the sixteenth until the eighteenth centuries. This period was characterized as having been a 'zentralen Umschaltphase', a period of transition for which

¹⁴⁹ Benedetto Croce, *History as the story of liberty* (London 1941) 41.

¹⁵⁰ For the traditional periodization see the influential book of Jacob Katz, *Tradition and crisis. Jewish society at the end of the Middle Ages* (New York 1993), likewise the volume edited by Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, *A history of the Jewish people* (Cambridge Mass. 1976) 385; on the ideology behind this periodization: Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish life in medieval Europe* (Cambridge 2010) 64-82. The concept of the 'long eighteenth century' refers commonly to the period 1680 to 1815 or even 1840. As J.C.D. Clark stated, it is considered to be 'an extended era with a unity and integrity of its own which belongs neither to "pre-modernity" nor to "modernity" as familiarly understood', in his: *English society, 1660-1832* (2nd ed.; Cambridge 2000) 14. It has been widely adopted since, cf. Frank O'Gorman, *The long eighteenth century. British political and social history, 1688-1832* (London/New York 1997); Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms eds., *Cultures of power in Europe during the long eighteenth century* (Cambridge 2007); not only in political but also cultural history: Joris van Eijnatten ed., *Preaching, sermon and cultural change in the long eighteenth century* (Leiden 2009) and Rosamaria Loretelli and Frank O'Gorman eds., *Britain and Italy in the long eighteenth century. Literary and art theories* (Cambridge 2010).

¹⁵¹ Michael A. Meyer, 'Where does the modern period of Jewish history begin?' *Judaism* 24 (1975) 328-338; David B. Ruderman, 'Michael A. Meyer's periodization of modern Jewish history. Revisiting a seminal essay' in: Lauren B. Strauss and Michael Brenner eds., *Mediating modernity. Challenges and trends in the Jewish encounter with the modern world. Essays in honor of Michael A. Meyer* (Detroit 2008) 27-42; Elisheva Carlebach, 'When does the modern period of the Jewish calendar begin?' in: *ibidem*, 43-54.

¹⁵² E.g. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor* 139; Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish history* 21-22; *idem*, 'Historiography, Jewish' 387-388.

traditional and modern characteristics could be identified. These characteristics often complemented or combined with each other, though they also sometimes clashed.¹⁵³

Jonathan Israel was among the first to identify a related distinct period in Jewish history, a period he labeled the age of mercantilism. According to Israel, in this period economic factors – in this case mercantilism – prevailed, for the first time in Jewish history, over traditions and religion; at the same time, radical enlightened thinking gradually resulted in ‘a freed, more open, and more tolerant Europe during the early modern age’.¹⁵⁴ According to Israel’s thesis, the early modern age was the period in which Western European Jews underwent a process of ‘release from the doctrinal and legal shackles of the past’.¹⁵⁵

In contrast to Israel, David B. Ruderman, in his recent seminal book on the early modern Jewish experience, proposes a definition which creates more space for internal Jewish developments. He summarizes the characteristics of this period in Jewish history into five developments: growing mobility resulting in more encounters among Jews of different backgrounds and between Jews and non-Jews; second, the growth of communal cohesion with strong lay leadership; third, a knowledge explosion resulting from the printing press and the entrance of Jewish students into universities; fourth, a crisis of rabbinic authority; and fifth, mingled identities of converso Jews, Sabbateans, Jewish converts to Christianity and Christian Hebraists. In short, the early modern period, per Ruderman’s definition, was dynamic and evidence of both the growth of internal Jewish cohesion and new levels of Jewish participation, confrontation and mingling with contemporary Christian societies and cultures.¹⁵⁶

The introduction of an ‘early modern age’ to Jewish history has widely been received as a welcome periodisation that enables historians to better understand the dynamics of Jewish life and culture between the Middle Ages and modernity. One reason the concept has been regarded as effective is that it avoids presupposing unilinear, progressive and teleological development from tradition to modernity. Likewise, the concept avoids the inadequate dichotomy of tradition versus modernity.¹⁵⁷ However, the position of the eighteenth century remains much discussed. Israel characterizes the period 1650-1713 as having been a time of expansion for European Jewry, but he identifies the eighteenth century as having been in general an ‘epoch of decline’. For European Jewry, the eighteenth century witnessed economic

¹⁵³ Ilja Mieck, *Europäische Geschichte der Frühen Neuzeit. Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart etc. 1977) 22-24.

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the age of mercantilism 1550-1750* (London 1998) 258.

¹⁵⁵ Israel, *European Jewry*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ David B. Ruderman, *Early modern Jewry. A new cultural history* (Princeton 2010) passim.

¹⁵⁷ Ruderman, *Early modern Jewry*, 226.

and demographic deterioration of their position within European societies, even as their traditional communal structures and authorities suffered gradual dissolution. Israel concludes: 'It is hard to deny, in any case, that what was an age of tremendous economic vitality and increasing opportunity was, generally speaking, for the Jews an era of stagnation, decay, and impoverishment, both economic and cultural'.¹⁵⁸ Ruderman, however, includes the eighteenth century (at least until 1782) in his definition of the early modern age. Nonetheless, the eighteenth century did not see Jewish intellectuals proposing new articulations of Jewish cultures that were radically different from those offered by their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century predecessors. These later intellectuals continued to follow the path laid out by their predecessors and thus remained closely connected to them. It was only with the changing political landscape, which enabled civic emancipation of Jews, that modernity entered Jewish history.¹⁵⁹

Shmuel Feiner has concentrated on the eighteenth century and reached an interpretation which offers both similarities and distinctions to the arguments of Israel and Ruderman. Like Israel, Feiner stresses the impact of the secularization of Jewish culture, especially the legitimization - by a skeptical philosophy - of such pleasures as food, fashion, wigs and wine.¹⁶⁰ Like Ruderman, Feiner maintains a keen focus on internal Jewish developments. What typifies Feiner's approach, however, is his emphasis on the eighteenth century as having been a dynamic age of transformations, conflicts and schisms. For him the 'fascinating, contradiction-filled eighteenth century'¹⁶¹ was not an age of decline and stagnation, as per Israel, nor a mere continuation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tendencies, as per Ruderman, but rather the age in which the intellectual elite broke from the religious elite and offered a new understanding of the world. In the eighteenth century, however, there were still no clear boundaries between the religious and the secular, the traditional and the modern.¹⁶² Feiner, a student of intellectual history, stresses the role of the enlightenment within early modern and modern Jewish history. He differentiates between early maskilim and the Berlin Haskalah. The early maskilim were active from the 1720's until 1770. They comprised a tiny, scattered group of Jewish intellectuals who sought to renew Jewish culture from within; they

¹⁵⁸ Israel, *European Jewry*, 237, 248, 252-253.

¹⁵⁹ Ruderman, *Early modern Jewry*, 195-202.

¹⁶⁰ Shmuel Feiner, *The origins of Jewish secularization in 18th-century Europe* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem 2010).

¹⁶¹ Shmuel Feiner, 'From Renaissance to Revolution: the eighteenth century in Jewish history' in: Resianne Fontaine, Andrea Schatz and Irene Zwiép eds., *Sephard in Ashkenaz. Medieval knowledge and eighteenth-century enlightened Jewish discourse* (Amsterdam 2007) 1-10, there 3.

¹⁶² Shmuel Feiner, 'On the threshold of the "New world" - Haskalah and secularization in the eighteenth century', *Simon-Dubnow-Institut Jahrbuch/Yearbook* 6 (2007) 33-45, there 34.

did so by introducing philosophy and natural sciences, reading non-Jewish books and to a certain degree participating in general culture.¹⁶³ The Berlin Haskalah - centered around its main ideologist, Moses Mendelssohn - manifested itself in the following two decades, and evolved into an internal Jewish revolutionary movement, furthering the birth of a self-conscious modern Jew, various manifestations of modern Jewish culture and the autonomy of the secular Jewish intellectual.¹⁶⁴

In discussing the characteristics of the eighteenth century, regardless of whether it is interpreted as having been a period of stagnation or (as is more common, and as I will also demonstrate hereafter) one of intellectual creativity, it becomes clear that contradicting tendencies, both within European societies and Jewish communities, characterized Jews during this period.¹⁶⁵ It is thus worthwhile to develop an interpretation of eighteenth-century Jewish historiography, not so much to locate this body of texts on either the (medieval) traditional or the modern side of the historical spectrum, but to analyze such texts as a cultural product of late early modern European Jewry. This is itself a dialectic process, as this historiography – especially the chronicles concentrating on contemporary history – is, as a whole, an expression of early modern culture but also, within the texts themselves, a defining, opening and closing of that same culture. The chroniclers documented eighteenth-century Ashkenazi life in its specificity and highlighted the differences with earlier medieval Jewish cultures and succeeding modern Jewish trends.

This chapter and the following ones can be read as a study of the characteristics of eighteenth-century Jewry through the lens of Amsterdam Yiddish historiography. I will first concentrate on the main history book, *Sheyris Yisroel*, and thereafter introduce and analyze subsequent elements of historiography. In order to more effectively understand the type of historiography which developed in the eighteenth century, this chapter will offer a short intellectual biography of Menahem Man ben Shlomo ha-Levi Amelander, the author of *Sheyris Yisroel*. This study of his life and works will facilitate a better understanding of the place of historiography within the whole of eighteenth-century Jewish culture.

¹⁶³ Shmuel Feiner, 'The early Haskalah in eighteenth-century Judaism' [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 67 (1997-1998) 189-240.

¹⁶⁴ Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia 2004); idem, *Moses Mendelssohn* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem 2005).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Jeremy W. Webster, 'Europe's Jews in the long eighteenth century', *Eighteenth Century Life* 30 (2005) 1, 76-91.

4.2 Ashkenazim in early modern Amsterdam

Eighteenth-century Amsterdam was home to two distinct Jewish communities, one Sephardic and one Ashkenazi. The older and more distinguished was the Portuguese (Sephardic) Jewish kehillah, founded at the beginning of the seventeenth century and functioning as the informal capital of the Western Sephardic Diaspora.¹⁶⁶ An extensive network that included relatives on the Iberian Peninsula and sister congregations in other European port cities, including Bordeaux, Hamburg and London, as well as in the American colonies, provided the Amsterdam Sephardim with an important position within international trade networks. As a result of the Thirty Years' War in Central Europe Ashkenazim also migrated to Amsterdam, predominantly from German cities. In Amsterdam they participated in the Sephardic kehilla until 1635; thereafter their numbers were large enough for them to develop their own community structures.¹⁶⁷

The city authorities recognized the two communities as being distinct and autonomous 'Jewish nations', controlled by their respective lay leaders, the *parnassim*. This same structure was applied to other ethnic minorities in the booming city of Amsterdam, which had come to attract migrants from throughout Europe. Each 'nation' was responsible for its own religious structures, education and poor relief. Such autonomy allowed the rabbinic court within the Jewish communities to enforce halakhah for community, family and civil cases. The Sephardic kehillah generally patronized the Ashkenazi one, often interfering in the latter's internal affairs. The city authorities generally supported the ruling *parnassim*, but did not hesitate to interfere when they considered such interference appropriate and in the city's interests. The Ashkenazi kehillah had its own autonomous domain, yet constantly had to reckon not only with its more distinguished Sephardic sister community but also with the city authorities.¹⁶⁸

Amsterdam was attractive to Jewish migrants for at least two reasons. First, from the sixteenth century until at least the first half of the eighteenth century the city was the commercial center of Europe. Its economy was booming and Amsterdam held a central position in colonial trade. The city was therefore in constant need of new labour forces. The

¹⁶⁶ Gérard Nahon, *Métropoles et périphéries sefarades d'occident. Kairouan, Amsterdam, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Jérusalem* (Paris 1993) esp. 71-234.

¹⁶⁷ Jozeph Michman, Hartog Beem and Dan Michman, *Pinkas. Geschiedenis van de joodse gemeenschap in Nederland* (Ede, Antwerpen, Amsterdam 1992) 44-46.

¹⁶⁸ *Pinkas*, 47-48; Yosef Kaplan, 'De joden in de Republiek tot omstreeks 1750, religieus, cultureel en sociaal leven' in: J.C.H. Blom et al., *Geschiedenis van de joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1995) 129-173, there 137.

existence of Sephardic firms, moreover, opened even more possibilities for Jews on the labour market.¹⁶⁹ Second, the Dutch Republic, being a confederation of seven provinces, left cities much scope for their own policies. One result was that both immigration and religious policies could differ significantly between the various cities. Cities in the province of Holland, such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, were relatively welcoming to newcomers and allowed them to perform religious rites as long as such activities did not destabilize social order. As with its economic potential and possibilities, the Dutch Republic's relative tolerance, especially for ethnic and religious groups that presented no threat to public order, made it a favorable destination for Jewish migrants.¹⁷⁰

By the early eighteenth century both of Amsterdam's Jewish communities had acquired stable positions within the city. The two communities were concentrated in the eastern part of the city; they maintained large synagogues and a fully developed Jewish infrastructure. However, whereas the Sephardic population stabilized at approximately 3,000 persons, the Ashkenazi population grew from 3,200 in 1700, to over 9,000 in 1725 and to 14,000 in 1750. Ashkenazim from Central and Eastern Europe opted to settle in Amsterdam, hoping to find work in the city's still important economy. This population growth led to further extension of the Ashkenazi infrastructure, with new synagogues, an enlarged community apparatus and a growing awareness of Amsterdam's role in the Ashkenazi diaspora. Yet the economy of the Dutch Republic was deteriorating, causing Amsterdam to lose its central position in the world economy to London. Sephardic firms were the first to suffer from this setback. In the course of the eighteenth century, despite their demographic growth, the overall economic position of Jews within the Dutch Republic declined. Indeed, most Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews lived in poverty and were dependent on the poor relief work of their communities.¹⁷¹

The rise of Yiddish historiography in Amsterdam should therefore be situated in a period during which Ashkenazim had been settling in the city for several generations but were still steadily growing in numbers and expanding their community structures. At the time they remained in the shadow of the much smaller, but more affluent, Sephardic community. Although there were several successful Ashkenazi families, most people in the community

¹⁶⁹ Jonathan I. Israel, 'De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden tot omstreeks 1750 – Demografie en economische activiteit' in: Blom, *Geschiedenis joden*, 97-126.

¹⁷⁰ Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by faith. Religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., London 2007) 321-328.

¹⁷¹ Israel, 'Republiek', passim; *Pinkas*, 56-59.

were poor and had to struggle for survival. These social and economic conditions left their imprint on the body of historical texts written by Amsterdam Ashkenazim in the long eighteenth century, as we shall see especially in the chapter on the 'successor chronicles' with their exhaustive attention for food prices, living conditions and social tensions within the city.

4.3 *Menahem Amelander and his family*

4.3.1 *The Amelander and Rudelsum families*

Menahem Man ben Shlomo ha-Levi Amelander was one of the Amsterdam Ashkenazim who lived in the long eighteenth century. Unfortunately, little is known about his life. He left no personal archives, and his contemporaries did not write about him. Thus his life and his position within the Ashkenazi community can be reconstructed only on the basis of circumstantial archival material and biographical details offered in his books.

The importance of one's family for the further development of one's life could hardly be overestimated in the early modern period. As Philippe Ariès has shown, the family was distinguished by an enormous mass of sociability. Social networks, marriage patterns and career perspectives were all tightly knit to the family. Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century family life, especially in the urban middle classes, started to change. The extended family made gradually place for the nuclear family, with more attention for an individual's personal choices. Jewish families witnessed these changes too, but less rapidly and in much smaller numbers.¹⁷² In Amelander's case the traditional family networks proved to be extremely important, although he also was influenced by the newer developments.

Amelander was born in 1698 in Amsterdam. His father, Shlomo ben Jacob ha-Levi, who died in August 1711 in Amsterdam, had taken the last name Ameland from his father-in-law.¹⁷³ Nothing is known about the father's ancestral and professional background, although it has been suggested that he was related to Uri Ha-Levi, the first (and almost legendary) religious

¹⁷² Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of childhood. A social history of family life* (New York 1962) esp. 404; family historians have debated Ariès' theses extensively, but his main conclusions still hold: Steven E. Ozment, *The loving family in old Europe* (Cambridge Mass. 2001); David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli eds., *Family life in early modern times (1500-1789)* [The history of the European family I] (New Haven/London 2001).

¹⁷³ The genealogical data presented here stems from the database 'Ashkenazi Amsterdam in the eighteenth century' from the Dutch Jewish Genealogical Data Base Akevoth, see <http://shum.huji.ac.il/~dutchjew/genealog/ashkenazi/6960.htm> and the related pages (consulted 13 May 2009).

leader of Amsterdam's Sephardic community.¹⁷⁴ Amelander's mother, Rachel, was the daughter of Yehiel Ameland, the patriarch of the Amsterdam Ameland/Amelander family. Yehiel, who died on 8 March 1703 in Amsterdam, married circa 1670 and had at least three children: the previously mentioned Rachel (died in October 1722), Menahem-Manle (died in 1723, in Amsterdam) and Levie (dates of birth and death unknown).

The surname Ameland(er) has long puzzled historians, as it seems to refer to one of the small islands in the northern part of the Netherlands, Ameland. But this is an isle where – as far as is known – no Jews lived in early modern times. The name's etymology must therefore to be sought elsewhere. Three possibilities emerge: first, in Leeuwarden, the Frisian capital, the synagogue was located near the Amelander Pijp (outlet); also, several Jewish families lived in the neighborhood. The name of the outlet may have been the source of the family name Amelander. Hartog Beem came across the name during his research into Leeuwarden's Jewish history, though no connection between this Frisian-Jewish family and the Amelanders in Amsterdam has been established.¹⁷⁵ Second, it has been suggested that the name refers to the German region Ammerland, which, since 1946, has been part of the Oldenburger Land in Lower Saxony and is near the northern parts of the Netherlands. The cities and villages in the Ammerland, such as Apen, Westerstede and Rastede, never had sizeable Jewish communities, though one of the few Jewish families may well have moved to the Dutch Republic and initiated the Amsterdam Ameland(er) family.¹⁷⁶ Third, as Fuks has suggested, it may be that Amelander is in fact read as Ommelander – in Ashkenazi Hebrew the two names are written the same – and that the name thus refers to the 'Groninger Ommelanden', the areas surrounding the city of Groningen.¹⁷⁷ Historical and genealogical research, however, have not come across the Jewish name 'Ommelander' in this region, which makes this third scenario highly unlikely.¹⁷⁸ Because the birthplace of Amelander's paternal grandfather, Yehiel Ameland, is unclear, it is impossible to decide which of these three explanations is correct, although the first two seem more convincing.

¹⁷⁴ Chaim Caran, 'Relationships among some early Jewish settlers in Dutch Friesland?' *Avotaynu* XX (2004) 3, 37-44.

¹⁷⁵ Caran, 'Dutch Friesland' 42; Hartog Beem, *De Joden van Leeuwarden. Geschiedenis van een cultuurcentrum* (Assen 1974) 73.

¹⁷⁶ Jits van Straten, Jan Berns, Harmen Snel, *Joodse achternamen in Amsterdam 1669-1850 / Jewish surnames in Amsterdam 1669-1850. Een inventarisatie en interpretatie / an inventarisation and interpretation* (Bennekom 2002) 150.

¹⁷⁷ Fuks, 'Menahem Man ben Salomo Halevi' 171.

¹⁷⁸ In 1745 a Michiel Levie van Ameland published an advertisement in the *Provinciale Groninger Courant*, Vol. 78, 28 September 1745. He was one of the leaders of the Groningen kehillah who, on the community's behalf, purchased a property on the Folkingestraat, in 1754, intended to become a synagogue. Thus, there is evidence of a Jew with the name 'Ameland' in Groningen – although as a contemporary and not a possible ancestor - but it is in Latin script and not spelled as Ommeland(er), which makes Fuks' suggestion highly unlikely. E. Schut, *De Joodse gemeenschap in de stad Groningen, 1689-1796* (Assen 1995) 105, 155, 237, 269.

Jacob and Rachel married sometime before 1695. They had six children, of whom Menahem Man Amelander was the fifth. The other children were Moses (died 1772), Hayyim (died 1772), Jacob (1693-1749), Ester (1695-?) and Benjamin (1701-1781).¹⁷⁹ The family did not belong to the poorest segments of the Amsterdam Ashkenazi community, as evidenced by the grandparents and the parents being buried at Muiderberg cemetery. This cemetery, located some 20 kilometers outside of Amsterdam, was intended for the more well-to-do of the community, particularly contributing members of the Ashkenazi kehillah. Poorer Jews were buried at Zeeburg cemetery.¹⁸⁰

On 18 June 1723 Amelander married Blim (or Bloeme) Isaac (1699-1775). According to the marriage contract he lived at that time in the Verversstraat, a tiny alley in the Jewish quarter. His bride lived nearby, in the St. Antoniesbreestraat, a larger street in the same quarter.¹⁸¹ She had been born, in Amsterdam, to Isaac Salomon Rudelsum (?-1719), a member and beadle of the hevra kadisha Gemiluth Chasadim, and Rachel (?-1708). Rudelsum, being a hevra employee, belonged to the second strata of the religious establishment in Ashkenazi Amsterdam. The burial society had its own synagogue, study circles and numerous other activities. Later, Blim's second brother, Salomon (or Zalman) Isaac Rudelsum, took over his father's position and served as well the hevra kadisha as a beadle.¹⁸²

Amelander's connection with his family-in-law became quite valuable for him, particularly as he and Eleasar Soesman Isaac Rudelsum (died 1780), one of Blim's two full brothers, developed a professional working relationship. Eleasar Soesman belonged to the intellectual elite of Ashkenazi Amsterdam, and he and Amelander collaborated on several publishing projects. The next paragraph will go more in depth into this relationship.

At their civil marriage ceremony Amelander and Bloeme chose as their respective witnesses Moses (one of Amelander's brothers) and Salomon Zalman Isaac Rudelsum (Blim's second brother). During the religious ceremony, on 20 Sivan 5483, Amelander's other brothers acted as witnesses. The couple had several children, though only three survived their first years: Salomon (1725-1802), Rachel (1727-?) and Jacob (1735-1817).

In his publications Amelander used the name Menahem Man ben Shlomo ha-Levi. His family name, Amelander or Amelander, was not disclosed until the Dutch Jewish second

¹⁷⁹ Menahem Man was in 1722 a witness at Benjamin's wedding; Municipal Archives Amsterdam (MAA), DTB 713/285.

¹⁸⁰ Samuel Israel Mulder, *Iets over de begraafplaatsen der Nederlandsch-Israëlitische Gemeente te Amsterdam en in het bijzonder over die te Muiderberg met ene opgave van twintig grafinschriften* (Amsterdam 1851).

¹⁸¹ MAA, DTB 713-432.

¹⁸² *SY* ed. 1743, 139v.

generation maskil Gabriel Polak revealed it in the introduction to the 1855 Dutch translation of *Sheyris Yisroel*. Polak had found, at Muiderberg cemetery, the tombstone for Amelander's daughter Rachel, to which the name Amelander had been added. After this discovery, Moritz Steinschneider added 'Amelander' as the author's final name in his influential and path-breaking catalogue of the Hebrew collections in the Oxford Bodleian Library. Hereafter, the name 'Amelander' was inseparably attached to 'Menahem Man ben Shlomo ha-Levi', not only in bibliographies and catalogues but also in historical studies.¹⁸³

Menahem Man was a typical Ashkenazi first name, combining a Hebrew and a Yiddish name. This was not uncommon in the Ashkenazi world; other notable Hebrew-Yiddish name pairings include Zvi Hirsh, Dov Ber and Benjamin Wolf.¹⁸⁴ As Amelander's first name was the same as his uncle's, one can assume that he had received a name that was popular in the family. Like many Dutch Jews, Amelander used, besides his Jewish name, an adaptation suited for use in Dutch society: Emanuel Salomon Levie.¹⁸⁵

The date of Amelander's death remains a mystery, especially as his name does not appear in either the records of the Amsterdam municipality or the registers of the Jewish cemeteries. Thus far it has been concluded that he must have died before 1767, as in that year's Torah edition, on which Amelander had collaborated, his name is presented with the abbreviation zts"l (zikhrono tsadik livrakha), indicating that the publishers were aware that he had died.¹⁸⁶ However, additional evidence facilitates more precise dating of his death. First, the legal papers for the marriages of their three children (in 1749, 1759 and 1763, respectively) all list the witness as having been not Amelander but his wife, Bloeme, and when she died, in 1775, she was registered as Amelander's widow. Second, the list of publications on which he collaborated abruptly ends, in 1743, after what had been a very intense period of editorial work that included publication of *Yosippon* and *Sheyris Yisroel*. Third, an important indication is a Torah edition of 1749, which included the same editorial additions for Amelander as the 1767

¹⁸³ Menachem Man ben Salomo Halevi, *Se'irith Jisrael of lotgevallen der Joden in alle werelddelen, van af de verwoesting des Tweeden Tempels tot het jaar 1770*, ed. L. Goudsmit Azn. and G.I. Polak (Amsterdam 1855) v; M. Steinschneider, *Catalogus librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin 1860/1) sp. 1737, nr. 6305.

¹⁸⁴ More about this phenomenon, including an inventory list with both male and female Hebrew-Yiddish name pairs: Daniel D. Stuhlman, 'Hebrew-Yiddish name pairs', on <http://home.earthlink.net/~ddstuhlman/crc105.pdf> (consulted 13 May 2009).

¹⁸⁵ MAA, DTB 713-432.

¹⁸⁶ *Humash tikkeun sopbrim* (Amsterdam 1767), title page. 1767 as terminus ante quem is given by Steinschneider, *Geschichtsliteratur*, 147; Erik, 'Geshikhte', 377; Shatzky, 'Letste shprotsungen', 256; and both editions of the *EJ* s.v. Amelander, and taken over by the catalogues of most libraries. Fuks in 1981, however, assumed that Amelander lived to be quite old, because on the 1767 and 1771 title pages the z"l indication would not be there. He must have interpreted the z"l there only in connection with Amelander's father. Fuks, 'Jiddisches Geschichtwerk', 173; cf. as well Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Joodse geschiedschrijving', 154-155, where they assume Amelander was still alive in 1776.

edition. On the title page of this earlier edition, he is presented as 'Menahem Man ben Shlomo ha-Levi z"l', whereas in 1743 on the title page of *Sheyris Yisrael* he was still referred to as 'Menahem Man ben Shlomo ha-Levi nr"u' [may God guard and bless him]. Technically the z"l could refer to his father, Shlomo ha-Levi, but a further indication in the text makes clear that Amelander himself had already passed away. At the point in the text where the commentary written by Amelander begins, the text reads: 'אמר מנחם הלוי ז"ל', 'thus says Menahem ha-Levi z"l'.¹⁸⁷ Thus, one must conclude that Amelander died sometime between 1743 and 1749. That he is not listed in the Amsterdam Jewish burial registers may be an indication that he died elsewhere and was buried outside Amsterdam. Likewise, it may be a consequence of the Amsterdam burial registers being incomplete. The latter is a more likely scenario, as Amelander's family remained in Amsterdam after his death.

4.3.2 *Amelander and Eleasar Soesman*

In the early modern period the family was of crucial importance for the development of someone's career.¹⁸⁸ Amelander's case is no exception to that rule. As noted previously, Amelander developed a professional relationship with his brother-in-law Eleasar Soesman. They were most likely about the same age and may well have already known each other from their school years. Whereas Amelander found his way within the Jewish community, Soesman became an intermediary between the Jewish and the Christian social spaces. Soesman's openness to Dutch culture is paralleled by Amelander's approach to non-Jewish sources of knowledge. In order to better understand the *milieu* in which Amelander lived and worked, it is productive to examine Soesman. This is all the more important, since Amelander and Soesman would eventually collaborate on two projects.

Amelander's brother-in-law was an intellectual who taught Hebrew to Christian students of the Amsterdam Athenaeum Illustre, although he did not hold a formal position there. At this time there were more people giving private lessons than there were official professors, and private lessons often competed with courses being taught by Athenaeum professors. As late as 1765 the city condemned this unauthorized teaching, and decreed that private lessons would only be accepted if the professor agreed. From Soesman's teaching grew his well-known 1741 Hebrew grammar book, *Mohar Yisrael*, written in Dutch, to which a

¹⁸⁷ *Hamishbah bumshei Torab* (Amsterdam 1749) 116v.

¹⁸⁸ G.A. Kooy, *Gezinsgeschiedenis. Vier eeuwen gezin in Nederland* (Assen 1985) 120-121.

Dutch-Hebrew and Hebrew-Dutch dictionary was added. Professor Cornelius Hugo Vonk, the resident Orientalist at the Athenaeum, recommended the book to the Christian audience.¹⁸⁹

Eleasar Soesman shared not only grammar and linguistics with his Christian public; he also made one of the great works of Jewish religious literature available to those unable to read Hebrew. The work in question, Isaac Aboab's *Menorat ha-ma'or* dated from the fourteenth-century and had been highly influential among Sephardim. Soesman translated Aboab's work into Dutch, and annotated it with his own remarks. The translation, entitled *De kandelaar des ligts*, was published in 1756 by a Christian publisher, Gerrit de Groot, and comprised four volumes. The book assembled important insights from the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud and presented them in a practical way, thereby offering an ethics handbook to the average Jewish reader. The multi-volume work became a huge success. Nevertheless, it is significant that Eleasar Soesman chose to present to Dutch Christians a Sephardic rather than an Ashkenazi book, a decision surely influenced by the relatively esteemed positions of Sephardim both in general society and within the Ashkenazi community. In the introduction he described the Sephardim as excelling above all other Jews because of the order and style in their literary works and their synagogue services. A few decades earlier, in 1722, Moses Frankfurter had published the first Yiddish translation of *Menorat ha-ma'or*, thus introducing it to Ashkenazim. Soesman became familiar with the book either through this Yiddish version, or through the Hebrew original, and he subsequently translated it into Dutch.¹⁹⁰

Eleasar Soesman's extraordinary position also led him into the field of Jewish-Christian polemics. For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we know of five published series of disputes between a Jewish scholar and a Christian theologian. In four of these exchanges, the Jewish representative was a Portuguese Jew. Soesman was the only Ashkenazi Jew to have engaged in this series of disputes. This says much about Soesman's position, as he not only knew Christians personally, but was also quite familiar with Christian theology.

¹⁸⁹ P.J. Knegtman, *Professoren van de stad. Het Athenaeum Illustre en de Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1632-1960* (Amsterdam 2007) 113; Jan Wim Wesselius, 'Eleasar Soesman's *Mohar Yisrael*' in: Adri K. Offenber, Emile G.L. Schrijver and F.J. Hoogewoud eds., *Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana. Treasures of Jewish booklore. Marking the 200th anniversary of the birth of Lezer Rosenthal, 1794-1994* (Amsterdam 1996; 2nd ed.) 74-75.

¹⁹⁰ Isaac Aboab, *De kandelaar des ligts met deszelfs zeven lampen, of het gewoon huisboek der hedendaagsche Joden; bevattende hunnen gantschen keerkelyken burgerlyken godsdienst, met alle deszelfs plegtigbeden; en alomme vervuld met fraaye spreuken en gebeurtenissen der Talmudische Rabbynen* [eertyds in het Rabbynsch beschreven door den Wereldvermaarden leeraar onder de Portugeesche Joden Isaac Abuabh; thans in het Nederduitsch vert., en met doorgaande aanm. verrykt, door Eliazar Soesman] (Amsterdam 1756); Idem, *Sefer menorat ha-ma'or hibro Yizbaq Abobab ha-Sefardi im ha-ataqah li-lesbon Ashkenaz* [hu 'ataq a'y ... Moshe Frankfurt dayan de-q"q Amsterdam ... we-hosafnu 'al ha-rishonim mar'eh maqom ha-pesuqim; huv'a le-vet ha-defus 'al yede ha-mehaber ha-na'l; uve-hishtadlut nimraz meha-yaqar ... Haim Drukker] (Amsterdam 1721). On the Yiddish translation see: Shlomo Berger, 'Ashkenazim read Sephardim in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Amsterdam' *Studia Rosenthaliana* 35 (2001) 2, 253-265, there esp. 257-259.

Whereas Sephardic Jews, owing to their history and social standing, had a more natural entrance into the Christian world of letters, an Ashkenazi Jew like Eleasar Soesman, particularly as he was from a financially modest family, would have had to exert much effort to achieve such a position. Moreover, whereas in the other four cases the Christian representative always took the initiative to open debate, in the fifth case Eleasar Soesman posed himself as eager to enter the religious debate and invited Christian theologians to convince him of the claims of Christianity. In 1741-1742 he discussed – initially under the pseudonym ‘den Geleerden Jood’ (‘the Learned Jew’) - main topics in Judaism and Christianity with the Reformed Protestant theologians Johann Wilhelm Kals, Eggo Tonkens van Hoevenberg, three anonymous authors and Jacob Fundam, a Portuguese Jew who had converted to Christianity. The discussion is striking because of its direct and open tone, particularly as Soesman seems to feel unhindered to express his thoughts about the validity of the Jewish tradition and the shortcomings of the Christian tradition.¹⁹¹

Soesman was active not only in the dominant (Christian) society, but also within the Ashkenazi community. Part of this latter activity centered on the theme of the Ashkenazi community being a Jewish minority in a Christian dominant society. Prior to his public polemics, he had prepared a Yiddish translation of a century-old polemical treatise, *Sefer Nizabon*, by Salomon Zvi Hirsh of Aufhausen. This work had originally been published in a Hebrew, German and Yiddish version, entitled *Der Jüdische Theriak* (1615), and was a refutation of the vehemently anti-Jewish publication *Jüdischer abgestreifter Schlangenbalg* (1614), penned by the apostate Samuel Friedrich Brenz. Eleasar Soesman wished to strengthen his coreligionists for the daily debates with Christian fellow-citizens and to give them arguments – notably from the Bible – to refute the lies and attacks they would encounter.¹⁹²

Eleasar Soesman collaborated on three other important projects,¹⁹³ all of which required good command of Hebrew, though they were conducted in Yiddish. The first project, in 1725, was with Amelander, and concerned the first volume of *Magishei Minhab* – a Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible with commentaries. The second project involved editing *Sefer Ha-Magid* (Amsterdam 1738), a Yiddish translation, by R. Jacob ben R. Jitschak Ashkenazi, of

¹⁹¹ Jan Wim Wesselius, ‘Eleazar Soesman en de Amsterdamse polemieken van 1742’ *Studia Rosenthaliana* 27 (1993) 1/2, 13-35.

¹⁹² *Sefer ha-nizabon ha-niqra Zare ha-Yehudim* [hiber Zalman Zvi mi-Aufhausen neged Friedrich Franz mi-Itingen she-hirshi’a liktov sefer reshut ha-niqra Schlangen Balg neged kelal edat Yisra’el ... we-qam ha-torani Zusman ben Yizhaq Rudelsum ... lehadpis oto be-he’eteq ha-lashon de-mishtama le-kol ofi] (Amsterdam 1737) 2, 4, 59v.

¹⁹³ In addition to these publications, Eleasar Soesman also edited in collaboration with Amelander the Yiddish translation of the ethical book *Shevet musar* (Amsterdam 1732), written by Elyahu ha-Kohen Itamari (Hebrew edition: Constantinople 1712) and published by Naphtali Hertz Levi Rofe.

the Hebrew Bible. On the title page Eleasar Soesman is identified as a book seller.¹⁹⁴ The third project was connected to the other two, and concerned a Yiddish textbook on the Torah, entitled *Migra meforash*, or *Scriptures explained* (Amsterdam 1749). This textbook adopted the catechism, the pedagogical method then very popular in early modern Europe, and so the textbook as such was the first Jewish catechism. Via its question-and-answer format the students learned the principal points of each week's Torah portion. Soesman focused on children unable to learn the extensive materials in *heder* because their teachers had too many pupils or because their programs were filled with too many other subjects.¹⁹⁵

Considered in light of his other activities, one could interpret Soesman's efforts to make the Bible better known among Ashkenazi Jews as paralleling similar trends within Christian society. Among Dutch Protestants, having knowledge of the Bible was highly esteemed; the officially sanctioned Statenvertaling (States Version, 1637) was widely disseminated, and the Old Testament served, much more than for Catholics and Lutherans, as a source for sermons and even for formation of Dutch Reformed identity. Pastors stressed the need for churchgoers to read the Bible and they therefore supported projects to translate the Bible into the vernacular. In such a climate Soesman's collaboration on Yiddish translations of the Bible, with commentaries from traditional Jewish perspectives, can be interpreted as an effort to make the Bible available for those in the Ashkenazi community who lacked sufficient Hebrew to read it in the original form. Among such readers (of whom there were many within the community) paraphrases such as the *Tsene-Rene* were highly popular and widely read. By reading the Bible themselves, in a Yiddish version, Dutch Ashkenazim would develop a better understanding of Jewish tradition and even, eventually, when needed, be better prepared for conversations about religious issues with their non-Jewish neighbours.

With Eleasar Soesman in the family, Amelander was linked to the world of Christian Hebraists, general knowledge and Jewish-Christian polemics. Soesman operated in both Ashkenazi and Protestant society and he maintained a self-conscious attitude in doing so, even though he was subject to fierce criticism from some Ashkenazim for his openness to non-

¹⁹⁴ *Sefer ha-Magid* I-III (Amsterdam 1738); Cf. Judah A. Joffe, 'Di amsterdamer Tenakh-ibersezung magischej minhoh fun 1755?' *Yivo-Bleter* 14 (1939) 229-250, there 233.

¹⁹⁵ Chava Turniansky, 'Mikra Meforash' by Eliezer Sussmann Rudelsom. An unusual Yiddish textbook for the Study of the humash' [Hebrew] in: S. Japhet ed., *The Bible in the light of its interpreters. Sarah Kamin memorial volume* (Jerusalem 1994) 497-517; idem, 'On didactic literature in Yiddish in Amsterdam (1699-1749)' [Hebrew] in: *Studies on the History of Dutch Jewry*, Vol. 4 (Jerusalem 1984) 163-178; Andreas Gotzmann, *Eigenheit und Einheit. Modernisierungsdiskurse des deutschen Judentums der Emanzipationszeit* (Leiden etc. 2002) 72; M. Güdemann, *Quellenschriften zur Geschichte des Unterrichts und der Erziehung bei den deutschen Juden. Von der ältesten Zeiten bis auf Mendelssohn* (Berlin 1891) 291-292.

Jewish culture.¹⁹⁶ The same principles and border crossings between the two societies, are also to be detected in Amelander's historiographical endeavour in the 1740's, as the following chapters will demonstrate. The relation between Soesman and Amelander, their economic cooperation and shared ideas, shows the continuity between family life and work and the importance of functions of kin in the workplace – even in a relatively new and open branch such as the book industry.¹⁹⁷

4.4 *Amelander and the Western Ashkenazi yeshiva network*

There was, however, one moment when Amelander left the family and was on his own. Although he surely enjoyed a traditional Jewish education in Amsterdam, he subsequently left for Prague and concluded his studies there. Leaving Amsterdam for a yeshiva elsewhere, was a moment in which a boy had to survive outside the context of the family, a phase in which he 'emancipated' from the family – although still dependent on his parents' assistance. Travelling individually on such an early age, as did not only Jewish boys but also students in general, was a specific feature of the early modern age and constited a change in traditional patterns of family life.¹⁹⁸

Amelander's education offers a clear indication of how Amsterdam functioned within the whole of the Ashkenazi diaspora. Amsterdam was well-known in the Ashkenazi world for its Hebrew printing presses and relative tolerance, but it was not a center of Jewish learning and important yeshivot. Moreover, as studying in different places was part of the yeshiva system, a number of Amsterdam Jewish boys who wished to develop their Jewish knowledge left the city, primarily for Central European yeshivot. Different segments had become established within the Ashkenazi world, and Western and Central Ashkenazi Jewry – stretching from Metz to Prague – had a different profile than Polish Ashkenazim, with their stress on the interpretative method of *pilpul*. Whereas the Western and Central European yeshivot remained attached to the medieval yeshiva model, with a broad curriculum directed at training the students to practise rabbinic responsibilities, the Polish yeshivot went through a process of

¹⁹⁶ Aboab, *Kandelaar des ligts*, iv-v.

¹⁹⁷ Ariès, *Centuries of childhood*, 404.

¹⁹⁸ Kooy, *Gezinsgeschiedenis*, 120.

‘academization’, while concentrating on the hermeneutics and detailed study of Talmud.¹⁹⁹ Amsterdam, as part of this Western circuit, was oriented towards centers of learning such as Frankfurt am Main, Fürth, the Alsace and Prague.²⁰⁰

In *Sheyris Yisroel* Amelander notes that in 1713 – at the age of fifteen – he had studied under the direction of the Prague chief rabbi David Oppenheim (1664-1736).²⁰¹ The bibliophile Oppenheim was well acquainted with the Jewish communities in Amsterdam and was in direct contact with many of the Hebrew printing firms in the city. He held the most important Jewish book collection of the time, with no less than 4,800 books and 780 manuscripts, which he stored in the Hannover house of his father-in-law, Lipmann Cohen, due to concerns about the Habsburg censor.²⁰²

During the period when Amelander studied in Prague, Oppenheim was expanding his authority in an unprecedented manner. In 1702 he had become the chief rabbi of Prague, and subsequently managed to extend his span of control to the rest of Bohemia by acquiring (in 1713 and 1715) the two provincial chief rabbinic positions. In 1718 he was named the *rosh yeshiva* of Prague. Oppenheim was able to accumulate his positions of authority because of the poor conditions of large parts of the Jewish community, which suffered from natural disasters, expulsions and poverty, and because he could rely on assistance from the capital, Vienna, where his uncle was a court Jew.²⁰³

At the beginning of Amelander’s stay in Prague – and perhaps longer, although this is uncertain, as we do not know how long he studied there – Oppenheim was not the acting rosh yeshiva, but he must have offered private teachings at his house or served as a teacher at the yeshiva as well. Besides the regular Western and Central European yeshiva curriculum, which included *gafat*, - Gemara, Rashi’s Talmud commentary and the Tosafot – and *poskim* – halakhic works such as the *Arba’ah turim* and the *Shulchan arukh* -, Oppenheim may have also introduced Amelander to the kabbalah, which was deeply rooted in the tradition of the Prague rabbinate. Amelander would later deal with the growing popularity of kabbalah among Ashkenazim and demonstrate his familiarity with the topic. Students also became familiar with

¹⁹⁹ Elhanan Reiner, ‘Transformations in the yeshivot of Poland and Ashkenaz in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the debate over “pilpul”’ [Hebrew] in: Israel Bartal, Ezra Mendelsohn, Chava Turniansky, *Sefer yovel le-Chone Shmeruk* (Jerusalem 1993) 9-80.

²⁰⁰ Jay R. Berkovitz, *Rites and passages. The beginnings of modern Jewish culture in France, 1650-1860* (Philadelphia 2004) 60-62.

²⁰¹ SY ed. 1743, 122v-123r.

²⁰² Dov Schidorsky, ‘Jewish libraries’ in: Wayne A. Wiegand and Donald G. Davis eds., *Encyclopedia of Library History* (New York etc. 1994) 322-325, there 323-324; Alexander Marx, ‘The history of David Oppenheimer’s library’ in: idem, *Studies in Jewish history and booklore* (New York 1944) 238-255.

²⁰³ Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of community. The Jewish experience in the Czech lands* (Berkeley CA 2000) 24.

the local Jewish community. They often spent Shabbat and holidays with Jewish families; in return the students assisted in the education of their hosts' children. In synagogue, the students had specific places and were required to assist during the services. Oppenheim's students had certain amusements, such as staging a *Purim shpil*.²⁰⁴

Amelander's stay in Prague would later significantly influence his history book *Sheyris Yisroel*, in which he devoted much attention to Prague Jewish history and used besides his own experiences as well his ongoing contacts with Prague Jewry. Likewise, the broad Western and Central European yeshiva training had introduced him to the major works of the Jewish tradition, which he would use as sources for historical information.

Amelander also identified himself as having been a pupil of R. Moses Frankfurter (1672-1762), one of the leading rabbis in Amsterdam and a dayyan at the Ashkenazi beth din.²⁰⁵ Frankfurter's father, R. Shimon ben Israel Frankfurter (1634-1712), was likely born in Polish Skzwiezyna (Schwerin) and died in Amsterdam. The elder Frankfurter served for more than thirty years as a rabbi to the Amsterdam burial society Gemiluth Chasadim; in this position he must have worked on a daily basis with Amelander's father-in-law, Rudelsum, the beadle of the hevra. Both positions were later transferred to their sons, respectively Moses Frankfurter and Salomon Isaac Rudelsum.²⁰⁶ Shimon Frankfurter became widely known as the author of *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, which was both a halakhic standard work and a practical guide on Jewish burial rituals. Shimon adopted the family name – which referred to Frankfurt am Main – from his father-in-law, whose family probably had come from there.²⁰⁷

Amelander may have been a student of Moses Frankfurter either before or after his studies in Prague, and perhaps even both. It is possible that Frankfurter, having an extensive network in the Ashkenazi diaspora, was the person who recommended Amelander to the Prague yeshiva.²⁰⁸ It is not known what exactly Amelander studied under Frankfurter, yet by introducing himself as having been his student Amelander stressed the significance of Frankfurter in his life. Amelander's acknowledgment of his teacher may have been in recognition of the quality of the education; it may also have stemmed from more political

²⁰⁴ Kieval, *Languages* 104; Isidore Fishman, *The history of Jewish education in Central Europe. From the end of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century* (London 1944) 38-39, 122-124.

²⁰⁵ The surname is sometimes as well spelled as Frankfurt or Frankfort. I have chosen here to use the variant 'Frankfurter' which is used in most instances.

²⁰⁶ *SY* ed. 1743, 139r-139v.

²⁰⁷ Avriel Bar-Levav, *The concept of death in Sefer ha-Hayyim (the book of life) by Rabbi Shimon Frankfurt* (Hebrew) [Ph.D. Department of Philosophy, Hebrew University Jerusalem, 1997] 256-284; on Moses Frankfurter esp. 257-259; idem, 'Amsterdam and the inception of the Jewish republic of letters' in: Kaplan, *Dutch intersection*, 225-237.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Fishman, *Jewish education*, 40.

reasons – as Frankfurter became Amelander’s first employer. Nonetheless, it is clear that Frankfurter held a high opinion of his student, as in 1724 he invited Amelander to work for him at his printing firm. The connections between the Frankfurter and Rudelsum families - Amelander had married into the latter, in 1723 - also likely worked in his favour.

Frankfurter was both a rabbi and a printer. This was not uncommon in Amsterdam. For example, Frankfurter’s colleague Joseph Dayyan combined his position as dayyan with owning a printing firm, and the two colleagues occasionally collaborated on printing projects. Frankfurter was active in the printing business from 1712-1714 and from 1721-1746. When he started he was able to take over material from the firm of Marcheses and Palasios, for whom he had worked previously. From 1721 onwards he printed at least 34 titles, most of which were large and ambitious projects. Frankfurter also managed to enter the Amsterdam book guild (he was a member from 1727-1739), whose membership required that one be an official citizen of Amsterdam, familiar with the Dutch language and able to pay the fees.²⁰⁹

The fact that Amelander enjoyed studies in both Amsterdam and Prague evidences not only that he was talented enough to continue studying after his *bar mitzva*, but also that his family had the financial means to send him to a yeshiva abroad. During his stay in Prague Amelander developed a far broader sense of the Ashkenazi diaspora and of Europe in general than he would have acquired had he not left Amsterdam. At the Prague yeshiva he met students from all over Western and Central Europe and got to know their traditions, stories and opinions. Furthermore, in Prague he also experienced a political climate which was less favourable for Jews than in Amsterdam. Thus he became familiar with the diversity of diaspora experiences of Ashkenazi Jews. Likewise, studying under David Oppenheim and Moses Frankfurter linked him to two influential and highly esteemed rabbis in the Ashkenazi world. His connections to these renowned teachers influenced him and furthered his career. The special attention for Prague and its religious traditions in *Sheyris Yisroel* should be explained by Amelander’s stay in Prague under Oppenheim’s direction, while Frankfurter not only employed Amelander but also influenced him with his Yiddish agenda (see paragraph 4.8).

²⁰⁹ Marvin J. Heller, *Printing the Talmud. A history of the individual treatises printed from 1700 to 1750* [Brill’s series in Jewish studies 21] (Leiden etc. 1999) 252; Rena G. Fuks-Mansfeld, ‘The role of Yiddish in early Dutch-Jewish Haskalah’ in: Shlomo Berger, Aubrey Pomerance, Andrea Schatz and Emile Schrijver eds., *Speaking Jewish – Jewish speak. Multilingualism in western Ashkenazi culture* [Studia Rosenthaliana 36] (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA 2003) 147-155, there 150-153.

4.5 Amelander and the Jewish printing industry

When Frankfurter restarted his printing firm, in 1721, he did most of the work himself. He edited works, wrote introductions to books and printed them; in all this he displayed a marked textual-philological sensitivity and awareness of the transmission process of Jewish manuscripts and books.²¹⁰ He soon took on Amelander to be an editor and corrector on several of his most prestigious projects. This had lasting influence on Amelander's life, as from that moment on the Jewish printing industry was the environment in which he employed his talents. The printing projects with which he became involved – eight in total, until he began writing his history book *Sheyris Yisroel* - offer an impression of his abilities and methodologies, along with an indication of the ideology behind these projects. To develop a paper understanding of *Sheyris Yisroel*, it should be interpreted as a subsequent step to his work on these projects, a step in which culminated much of what Amelander had learned previously.

Amelander's first involvement with a publishing project concerned the printing of the so-called rabbinic Bible, the *miqra'ot gedolot*. This was in fact the first Jewish publication of this work. Thus far it had been printed by Christian publishers, but Frankfurter now reclaimed it. In addition to the commentaries that were already part of the collection, such as Rashi and ibn Ezra, Frankfurter now included a whole series of new commentaries, bringing the total number of commentaries to no less than seventeen. Frankfurter's edition of the *miqra'ot gedolot*, entitled *Kehillot Moshe*, consisted of four large format volumes, and served a crucial role in spreading the commentaries of R. Obadiah Sforno (ca. 1475-1550), R. Menahem ben Solomon Meiri (1249-1316) and Jacob di Illescas (fourteenth century). Frankfurter also wrote a commentary of his own, which he added to the other sixteen. The project, conducted from 1724 till 1727, was supported by *haskamot* from the Sephardic and Ashkenazi rabbis of Amsterdam and one from Frankfurt am Main. As such, it was a publication that brought together Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions, a process that started especially with the printing of Hebrew books in Amsterdam.²¹¹

The small group of editors included, besides Frankfurter and Amelander, the *ger* (proselyte) Jacob ben Abraham Rishon and, at various points during the course of the project,

²¹⁰ Bar-Levav, 'The Jewish republic of letters', 229-230.

²¹¹ *Sefer kehillot Moshe, ve-hu ha-Miqra gedolah im kol ha-perushim*, Vol. 1 (Amsterdam 1724) title page and the *haskamot* (p. 1).

Abraham ben Moses ha-Levi, Naphtali Herz Levi Rofe²¹² and Frankfurter's son Samuel. This small staff collected, edited, corrected and proofread the text of the Hebrew Bible, the Aramaic Targum Onqelos, the massoretic notes (gedolah and ketanah) and the sixteen commentaries.²¹³ In the first volume Amelander introduced himself to the readers as a pupil of Frankfurter who, under the leadership of his teacher, had meticulously corrected the Biblical text. In the final volume he further praised Frankfurter for having the entrepreneurial courage and wisdom to publish these *migra'ot gedolot*. Amelander assured the readers that he had also worked extremely hard on the project. Abraham ben Moses ha-Levi had edited the commentaries, but Amelander had corrected the text of the Bible. Amelander highlighted two principles that had been important for him throughout the entire process: first, putting everything in the correct order, so as to make it easy for the reader to study the book; second, making the language as clear as possible.²¹⁴ Here we discover already one of the traits that would later also typify Amelander's historiography, namely a central place for the reader. Amelander aimed to make the reading experience as simple and comfortable as possible.

In his second publishing project, which concentrated on the Hebrew Bible, Amelander built upon the expertise he had acquired while editing *Kehillot Moshe*. These projects were conducted almost simultaneously, thereby affording Amelander opportunity to combine his work for both book projects. Amelander, together with his brother-in-law Eleasar Soesman, began an ambitious project to prepare a Hebrew edition of the Tenakh, with a bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish version of Rashi, Yiddish Bible paraphrases and a commentary written by Amelander and Soesman themselves. They had undoubtedly benefited greatly from their work on *Kehillot Moshe*, both for their textual and editing skills and for their commentary. Their joint project – a book series entitled *Magishei Minbah* - was published from 1725 till 1729.

The first three volumes – Torah, Nevi'im rishonim and Nevi'im aharonim -were printed by Frankfurter. The final volume – Ketuvim – was printed by Naphtali Herz (ha-)Levi Rofe, who had assisted in the editing process of *Kehillot Moshe*. Amelander worked on the entire project; Soesman collaborated only on the first volume, after which Naphtali Rofe joined Amelander as editor for the next three volumes. In the final volume Amelander praised his co-

²¹² More on Naphtali Herz Levi Rofe especially in paragraph 4.2.2.

²¹³ Heller, *Printing the Talmud*, 253, who (rather discourteously) gives the name R. Abraham ben R. Jacob Segal instead of Abraham ben Moshe ha-Levi.

²¹⁴ *Kehillot Moshe*, Vol. 1 (Amsterdam 1724) 1v; Vol. 2 (Amsterdam 1727) 1r.

editor as having been the saviour of the project after a period of troubles.²¹⁵ What exactly happened between Frankfurter and Naphtali Rofe is unclear, but we know that in 1727, halfway into the project, Frankfurter and Naphtali Rofe – under his Dutch name, Hartog Alexander – made a series of agreements before ‘the good men’ Levi Carpelis and Philip Ezekiel Cohen. These agreements were translated into Dutch and ratified by the notary Abraham Tzeewen. The records of the agreements offer unique and rare insight into the process of publishing *Magishei Minhab* and thus also into the workings of the Jewish book industry in eighteenth-century Amsterdam – the environment in which Amelander earned his living.²¹⁶

Frankfurter and Naphtali Rofe agreed that the latter would do the printing of the final two volumes, the *Nevi'im aharonim* and the *Ketuvim*. Because the first volume would carry the name of Frankfurter, it would be printed by Naphtali Rofe but with Frankfurter’s movable type components. These pieces were highly expensive, however, and so Naphtali Rofe’s wife stood surety. Likewise, employees of both firms would be present at the handing over of the letters so as to ensure that they were not damaged. Naphtali Rofe was allowed to use the letters only for *Magishei Minhab* and not for any other printings projects.

Every Sunday Frankfurter sent someone with enough paper, of good quality, to Naphtali Rofe, who in turn sent back the printed leaves, dry or even still wet. Naphtali Rofe promised to prepare two or three ‘bogen’ – bundles of pages printed together – per week. He was exempt from these deliveries only during Jewish festive days, when his employees were not working. Readers purchased the book via subscription and, for four groshen, received each week or every ten days a new installment of the book. This was, as far as we know, the first major Yiddish book project to be financed through reader subscriptions, a new method for spreading the risks of printing books. Apparently the approach was successful in this case, as it was subsequently used for other books – including Amelander’s *Sheyris Yisroel*.²¹⁷ Naphtali Rofe

²¹⁵ *Sefer magishei minhab, ve-bu Torah im perush Rashi ve-gam pe maspiq bi-leshon Ashkenaz al kol pasuq ve-pasuq ha-peshutah ve-gam ha-derush mi-kamah midrashim u-mejareshe ha-Torah tsyanenu ha-pesuqim 1, 2, 3 bi-fenim ve-gam ba-Rashi ve-gam ba-pe bi-leshon Ashkenaz*, Vol. 4: *Ketuvim* (Amsterdam 1729) 172r.

²¹⁶ Municipal Archives Amsterdam, Notaries’ archives (nr. 5075), archive of Abraham Tzeewen (nr. 7636), act nr. 636. I would like to thank Mrs. Odette Vlesing for her help in tracing this source.

²¹⁷ *Magishei Minhab*, I, Hakdamah bilshon Ashkenaz; Nokhem Shtif, ‘Dos abonentn-sistem af yidische sforim’ *Yidishe Filologie* 1 (1924) 388-392; Kagan has argued that it took well until the last quarter of the eighteenth century before subscription lists were added to the books. Some book projects, also in Amsterdam, failed to garner the necessary number of subscribers, as Amelander noted in *Sheyris Yisroel* for Benjamin Musaphia’s commentary on the Gemara Yerushalmi; Berl Kagan, *Hebrew subscription lists. With an index to 8,767 Jewish communities in Europe and North Africa* [Yiddish] (New York 1975) ix-x; SY ed. 1743, 133r. Subscription had been introduced earlier for Hebrew books, first in Amsterdam and thereafter in Hamburg, as revealed by: Peter T. van Rooden, Jan Wim Wesselius, ‘Two early cases of publication by subscription in Holland and Germany: Jacob Abendana’s *Mikhal Yofhi* (1661) and David Cohen de

pledged to maintain the quality that Frankfurter had started the project with, and he was not permitted to alter page lengths or line widths. Moreover, he was to print no less than 350 editions of the volume of the *Nevi'im aharonim*, and Frankfurter promised not to print any until his colleague's had gone out of print.

Amelander is mentioned twice in the contract. First, Naphtali Rofe agreed to print the final volume, *Ketuvim*, according to the copy he would receive from Amelander, 'as long as Emanuel and Hartog will agree, and if it would result in a conflict, the good men will assign another, more capable one with whom both Hartog and Moses are content'.²¹⁸ Second, the printer promised to send Amelander the three books he still owed him. Most likely, these were three copies of the already printed volumes of *Magisbei Minhab*.²¹⁹

Magisbei Minhab was not an entirely new work. This series of books was prepared, as was *Kehillot Moshe*, by assembling existing material, ordering it into a new format and correcting and reworking the language, alongside some original, new additions from the editors. The main source for large parts of the work was the Yiddish Bible paraphrase *Sefer Ha-Magid*, written by the author of the *Tsene-Rene*. The project, like *Ha-Magid*, was not complete, as no translation was provided for *Divrei ha-yamim* – probably because *Divrei ha-yamim* was considered a mere repetition of *Melakhim*. Moreover, the *Megillot* were completely omitted from the collection. As Joffe has demonstrated, only the Torah translation was new.²²⁰

The strikingly innovative aspect of this project, however, was that a Yiddish Bible edition was being printed the same way as Hebrew Bibles were: namely, with the authorized commentary of Rashi and other commentaries in addition to the Biblical text. Even more innovative was that this was done not only for the Torah but also for the rest of the Bible, which had generally received less attention. In this way, *Magisbei Minhab* symbolized the 'emancipation' of Yiddish. People who were unable to study official editions of the Hebrew Bible were now given opportunity to acquire traditional Jewish knowledge in their day-to-day language. In order to reach as broad a public as possible, *Magisbei Minhab* was printed in two editions: an 'édition de luxe', in larger format and on thicker paper, for the well to do; and a

Lara's *Keter Kehunna* (1668), *Quaerendo* 16 (1986) 110-130; on the general context in which subscription was introduced: Joris van Eijnatten, 'Communicatie en publieke orde, 1450-1800' in: Willem Frijhoff and Leo Wessels eds., *Veelvormige dynamiek: Europa in het ancien régime 1450-1800* (Heerlen 2006) 341-372, there 360-362.

²¹⁸ The whole text in Dutch reads as follows: 'Hartog moet drukken wat nog te drukken is met de 5 histories en uyt legging met heubreeus rassi ende hoogduyts naar de kopij van Emanuël Levij te weten soo lang sig Emanuël met Hartog sullen verstaen, ende soo tusschen de bijde disput mogte comen, sullen de goede mannen een ander cappabler stellen waer mede hartog als mozes moten te vreden sijn'.

²¹⁹ 'De 3 boeken die Emanuël moet hebben moet hartog verders besorgen te weten soo verre hem manqueert.'

²²⁰ Joffe, 'Magishej minhoh' 231-232.

small edition for the less wealthy. The authors and publishers achieved their goal: *Magishei Minbah* became exceptionally successful and was reprinted many times (Joffe notes no less than 20 editions) well into the nineteenth century.²²¹

While working on the two major Bible projects, Amelander undertook one more initiative: editing an edition of *Sefer Abudraham*, which Frankfurter published in 1726. This book, written by David ben Josef ben David Abudraham, a Jew from Seville, offered detailed commentary on the siddur, the Jewish prayerbook, and the Pesach haggadah. Abudraham collected those parts of the rabbinic tradition, ranging from the Talmud to contemporary commentators, that were related to the liturgy and built from them a well-structured explanation and survey of the texts that had a key role in Jews' daily life. The author was renowned for his grammatical knowledge, which he used to interpret difficult passages in the texts.

Sefer Abudraham was concluded in 1399 but was not published until 1489, in Lisbon. When Amelander edited a new version of the book, it had last been published 160 years earlier, in 1566, in Venice. The Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Amsterdam, Abraham ben Juda Berlin (died 1730), mentioned this fact as being a merit of Amelander's initiative. The chief rabbi granted Amelander the customary right to publish the work and forbade others to publish it for a period of ten years. Amelander himself revealed in his introductory words – in a patchwork of biblical and rabbinic phrases – that the book had become quite rare and expensive and was thus, for many people, not accessible for reading. With a nod to the famous Talmudic saying, 'there is no beth midrash without innovation' (אין בית מדרש בלא חידוש) (bHagiga 3a), Amelander noted about his new edition that: לא יהיה דפוס בלא חידוש, 'there would not be a print without innovation'. He therefore added indices to the book, which would aid the reader in finding particular sections that he wished to study further. What Amelander did not mention is that he had removed a passage about the calendar, probably because he had deemed it to be too complex for the common reader.²²²

Two aspects should be highlighted about Amelander's involvement with *Sefer Abudraham*. The first is that, although the work is written in Hebrew, it was not directed primarily at the rabbinic elite, who could study all the sources Abudraham quoted, but rather at readers who sought a short but authoritative commentary to the daily prayers. Like the Bible –

²²¹ Joffe, 'Magishey minkhe' 232-250.

²²² David ben Josef Abudraham, *Sefer Abudraham* (Amsterdam 1726) 1. The title page notes that Jacob ben Naphtali Hirsh collaborated on the edition, though he did not sign the introduction by the editor and is not mentioned in the *haskama* of the chief rabbi.

central in the two other projects - the siddur and the haggadah were an integral part of how Jews lived their daily lives. Also, this edition was part of an effort, undertaken by Frankfurter, Amelander and Eleasar Soesman, to disseminate traditional Jewish learning among the broad majority of Ashkenazi Jewry, who could not devote each day to study. The second aspect is that *Sefer Abudraham* was a Sephardic book, published initially only in the centers of the Sephardic Diaspora, but was now entering the Ashkenazi realm.²²³ Amelander clearly stimulated the spread of Sephardic knowledge among Ashkenazim.

Another project on which Amelander collaborated with his brother-in-law Eleasar Soesman was the publication, in 1732, of a more recent and contemporary book, Eliyahu ben Abraham ha-Kohen's *Shevet musar*. This book, by the Sephardic *dayyan* of Smyrna (Izmir), was first published in Constantinople, in 1712; it quickly became tremendously popular and was translated into Ladino and Yiddish. *Shevet musar* (Rod of instruction) was an ethics treatise, full of practical instructions for daily Jewish life and with a stress on the need for repentance.²²⁴ The title page and haskamat only mention Eleasar Soesman and a Jacob ben Shlomo as having been the initiators of the edition, which was printed by Naphtali Herz Rofe. On the final page, however, a small poem about the publication process appears, with an acrostic revealing the person who had actually edited the book faithfully to the first edition: Menahem ha-Levi – that is, Amelander.²²⁵

After these four projects, Amelander began working with Salomon ben Josef Proops, the founder of a publishing dynasty that survived well into the nineteenth century.²²⁶ Amelander, having garnered renown as a corrector and editor of books, now selected a classical rabbinic source: *Midrash Tanhuma*. The name of this collection of homiletic midrashim on the Torah refers to the fourth-century sage Tanhuma bar Abba. The work is divided according to the historical Palestinian three-year cycle of Torah reading. The midrash itself, however, dates from between the fifth and the ninth centuries. It became quite influential and was used by Rashi and cited in the *Yalkut* and *Arukh*.²²⁷

²²³ It is striking that only the Ashkenazi chief rabbi was asked to write a haskama, and not also the Sephardic one – as was the case with *Kehillot Moshe*. Of course, this could be partly explained as stemming from financial concerns, as publishers had to pay the rabbis for given haskamat.

²²⁴ Israel Zinberg, *The German-Polish cultural center* [A history of Jewish literature 6] (New York 1975) 165-169.

²²⁵ Eliyahu ben Abraham ha-Kohen, *Shevet musar* (Amsterdam 1732) 116v; This connection was discovered by Gabriel Polak, *Ha-Magid* 2, 26 February 1858, no. 3, 30-31.

²²⁶ Frankfurter was still connected to Amelander's labours, this time as one of the four rabbis who gave a haskama for *Midrash Tanhuma* – together with the Sephardic rabbis R. David Israel Athias and R. Jitschak Haim Abendana de Brito and his Ashkenazi colleague R. Joseph ben Shimon Akiba Ber.

²²⁷ Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*; translated and edited by Markus Bockmuehl (2nd edition; Edinburgh 1996) 302-306.

A complicating factor is that *Midrash Tanbuma* is commonly called *Tanhuma-Yelamdenu*, as does the Amelander edition on its title page: מדרש תנחומא הנקרא ילמדנו. Older sources sometimes quote Tanhuma and Yelamdenu as two different midrashim. However, according to recent research, it is likely that both names refer to the same original collection of haggadic midrashim, which came to be dispersed into different minor collections. Some were called Tanhuma, after the sage who is quoted often in the collection; others were identified as Yelamdenu, after the opening sentence of other sections of the book. This complex history has resulted in two collections, each bearing the name Tanhuma-Yelamdenu and having large parts in common, although there are also significant differences. One version was transmitted in manuscript and eventually published by S. Buber, in 1885. Amelander followed the other sub-collection, known as ‘the standard edition’, which had first been printed in Constantinople, in 1520-1522. The Mantua edition, from 1563, of this version became the direct *Vorlage* for the Amsterdam edition of 1733.²²⁸

As in the other books, Amelander presents himself as ‘of the youngsters of the Levi'im’, a recent branch to the old tribe. In the introduction he praises Salomon Proops (died 1734) – שלמה הוא ושלמה פעולתו – who had been willing to publish the book. In this work, Amelander, first of all, corrected *Midrash Tanbuma* critically, which he claimed had not been done before. Second, as with *Sefer Abudraham*, Amelander sought to make the reading of *Midrash Tanbuma* easier for the general public via helpful additions. The Mantua edition had included indices for the halakhic decisions, the *ma'asim* (stories), and the parables. Amelander in turn not only explained difficult words – such as those of non-Hebrew origin – but also elaborated upon complex issues. For this work he utilized Rashi's oeuvre and the *Arukh* (1100), R. Nathan of Rome's dictionary annex encyclopedia of words and issues in the Talmudim, Targumim and midrashim.²²⁹

The subsequent Torah edition was a large project, yet it was in line with Amelander's earlier editing work. This edition included an Aramaic translation of Onqelos, Rashi's commentary, the five *Megillot* with *Targum Sheni* (an Aramaic paraphrase and commentary on Ester), and the *haftarot*, with Rabbi David Kimhi's (Radak) commentary. Also added was a super-commentary on Rashi, *Deveq Tov*, written by the sixteenth-century Ashkenazi scholar

²²⁸ Ibidem; John T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanbuma: Exodus and Leviticus* (Hoboken NJ 1989) xi-xii; Samuel A. Berman, *Midrash Tanbuma-Yelammedenu. An English translation of Genesis and Exodus from the printed version of Tanhuma-Yelammedenu with an introduction, notes, and indexes* (Hoboken NJ 1995) x-xii.

²²⁹ *Midrash Tanbuma ha-nigra Yelamdenu* (Amsterdam 1733) iv. The book was printed in two different formats: a small one, easy to carry; and a large one, better suited for intensive study.

Simon ben Isaac Aschenburg (first printed in Venice, in 1548). Amelander clarified *Deveq Tor* and presented a commentary on it. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate a copy of the first edition of this *Hamisha humshei Torah*, but the extant 1749 edition refers to the first one, of 1735 (תצה לפ"ק), and acknowledges Amelander's work on it. The second edition, like the first one, was printed by Naphtali Herz Levi Rofe and his son-in-law Kosman ben Joseph Baruch.²³⁰

Amelander's next book project was again published by the Proops firm, which was now, after the death of Salomon Proops being operated by his children. This time Amelander presented a new edition of *Reshit Hokhma*, originally written in Safed in 1575 by Eliyahu de Vidas (1518-1592). This book is both a *musar* (ethics) book and a kabbalistic book in one. De Vidas, as the Amsterdam edition of 1737 notes on its title page, had been a pupil of the well-known kabbalist R. Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (known as the Ramak). De Vidas represented a rationalistic interpretation of the kabbalah, which was soon after the Ramak's death nearly completely superseded by Lurianic kabbalah teachings. De Vidas was active in kabbalistic circles in Safed and Hebron and constructed his mixture of practical, moral guidance with an anthological guide into the world of kabbalah. In its language, contents and metaphors the work was highly influenced by the *Zohar*, the main work of the kabbalah.²³¹

This book fits well into Amelander's publication list thus far, as it was meant to be an introductory text for those not yet initiated into this stream of Jewish mysticism. Just as *Magishei Minhab* helped non-scholars become familiar with the Hebrew Bible and *Sefer Abudraham* revealed the secrets of the prayer book to the average (Hebrew literate) reader, and just as *Shevet musar* offered what became a popular introduction to Jewish ethics, Amelander's edition of De Vidas's book would allow the broader Jewish public to become familiar with the kabbalah. De Vidas's book is well structured and written in a clear Hebrew. Amelander was not the first party in Amsterdam to release an edition of the book: in 1633 Menasseh ben Israel published David Cohen de Lara's Spanish translation of parts of *Reshit Hokhma*.²³²

The *haskamot* for the book make clear that Amelander had acquired a position in Jewish Amsterdam. While the *haskamot* noted thus far only mentioned the publishers, this

²³⁰ *Hamishab humshei Torah* (Amsterdam 1749) title page. The book was later republished by Joseph (1718-1786), Jacob (1722-1779) and Abraham (1733-1792), sons of Solomon Proops, in 1767, under the title *Humasb tikun sofrim*.

²³¹ Lawrence Fine, *Safed spirituality. Rules of mystical piety, the beginning of wisdom* (New York 1984) 82-87. The book became very popular in the eighteenth century: Zeev Gries, 'Ethical literature in Hebrew and Yiddish' in: idem, *The book in the Jewish world 1700-1900* (Oxford/Portland, Oregon 2007) 46-56, there 49.

²³² David Cohen de Lara, *Tratado del Temor Divino extracto del doctissimo libro llamado ressit bobmá, traduzido nuevamente del Hebrayco, a nuestro vulgar idioma* (Amsterdam 1633).

time the Sephardic rabbis David Israel Athias and Yitshak Haim Abendana de Brito identified Amelander as the 'בעל פל' מדר' תנחומה', the author of the commentary to *Midrash Tanhuma*. Apparently, Amelander's edition of *Midrash Tanhuma* – for which the same rabbis had provided a *haskama* – had made an impression on them. Rabbi Eliezer of Cracow, of the Ashkenazi kehillah in Amsterdam (also known as R. Eleasar of Brody or R. Elazar Rokeah), did not note the author and instead issued a *haskama* that concentrated on the book itself.²³³

Amelander promoted his edition of *Reshit Hokhma* by explaining that, although many studied the book in order to acquire wisdom, instruction and knowledge (in a hint to Proverbs 1, 2-7 as one of the places where the notion 'reshit hokhma' appeared), the editions published thus far were not well suited for the task. Often these editions contained only an introduction and failed to provide commentary and explanations of difficult words. According to Amelander, his generation could not do without such commentary, especially because so few people were familiar with the language of the *Zohar*, an essential work for understanding *Reshit Hokhma*. Amelander criticized earlier editions for their frequent deletions of passages – especially passages dealing with either the *Zohar* or the Gemara and midrashim – not least as such deletions resulted in the editions not even being complete. Amelander was correct in this observation, as the Spanish edition of 1633, as well as many Hebrew editions, were in fact only *qizurim*, abridged editions of the original text.²³⁴

For Amelander's project, he not only prepared a new edition of the entire work, but also explained difficult words and provided commentary. He entitled this commentary לדעת חכמה, 'To know wisdom', and offered two explanations for the title. First, he explained that via the commentary he wished for the reader to become familiar with and understand the book *Reshit Hokhma*, here shortened to *Hokhma*. The second explanation was more personal: in line with certain passages in *Reshit Hokhma* dealing with gematria, Amelander explained that his name, Menahem Man Ha-Levi, had the same numerical value as *Lada'at Hokhma*. For his commentary, Amelander used the Talmud, midrashim, the Mekhilta and the *Zohar*.²³⁵

The introduction includes a particularly intriguing passage, in which Amelander states that, although he wrote the commentary, he did not care for the mystical doctrines.²³⁶ This is a somewhat confusing message on the part of the author, not least because during his studies,

²³³ Eliyahu de Vidas, *Sefer reshit hokhma* (Amsterdam 1737) ..

²³⁴ De Vidas, *Reshit* ..

²³⁵ Ibidem.

²³⁶ Ibidem.

most probably in Prague, he had surely become familiar with the kabbalah. Among Ashkenazim, since the sixteenth century, the originally Sephardic kabbalah had acquired a special place of interest.²³⁷ Why, then, if Amelander did not care for the kabbalah's mystical doctrines, did he edit a work so obviously kabbalistic as *Reshit Hokhma*? He did not explain this incongruence. One element of the explanation would obviously be that the book was not just kabbalistic but also ethical. In all of Amelander's publishing activities one finds that he had special interest in addressing the practical significance of Judaism for everyday life. Amelander sought to bring non-learned and learned Jews alike closer to the main sources of Jewish tradition. The *musar* part of *Reshit Hokhma* fits well into this frame. In the meantime, as Amelander noted in the introduction, many people had been studying the book without suitable commentaries. Amelander likely shared the traditional fears of the rabbinic class about exposing the broader Jewish community to kabbalah, as also becomes evident in the most reserved way he treated the subject of kabbalah in his history book *Sheyris Yisroel*, yet he must have also realized that such opposition alone would merely lead to people studying unsatisfactory editions of *Reshit Hokhma*, especially editions lacking proper explanations. This likely influenced Amelander to undertake a new edition of *Reshit Hokhma*, with commentary.²³⁸

In 1738 Amelander again collaborated with his brother-in-law Eleasar Soesman. This time they worked on an edition of *Ha-Magid*, the Yiddish paraphrase of the *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*, which had served as one of the main sources for *Magishei Minhab*. Soesman edited the volume; Amelander made the corrections. He was introduced as someone with a great deal of experience (אשר כבר שמעו הולך למרחקים בהגהת ספרים הרבה אין קץ). This project returned Amelander to the endeavor that had marked the beginning of his career in the book industry: making the Bible better known within the Ashkenazi Jewish community. In the introduction to this newest work he stressed precisely this goal, writing that the ordinary man, just as the scholar, should be able to study on his own – albeit not in Hebrew, but in *taytsh*, Yiddish.²³⁹

After these projects, Amelander devoted himself to Jewish history, editing a new edition of *Sefer Yosippon* and writing a sequel to it, entitled *Sheyris Yisroel*. Before turning to these

²³⁷ Jacob Elbaum, 'The influence of Spanish-Jewish culture on the Jews of Ashkenaz and Poland in the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries' *Binah* 3 (1994) 179-197; in an interesting volume the perception of kabbalah among Ashkenazim is traced since the thirteenth century: Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan eds., *Mysticism, magic and kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism. International symposium held in Frankfurt a.M. 1991* [Studia Judaica XIII] (Berlin/New York 1995).

²³⁸ Amelander's edition was successful; it was at least twice reprinted with his commentary and introduction, by Josef ben Shlomo Proops in Amsterdam 1776 and in Lemberg 1804.

²³⁹ *Sefer ha-magid* I-III (Amsterdam 1738); quotations from the introduction to the first volume devoted to the *nevi'im rishonim*.

books, which are at the center of this thesis, I will analyze the findings in this paragraph on Amelander's book projects up to that point, in the context of eighteenth-century Ashkenazi Jewry.

4.6 Jewish library awareness and the formation of a Jewish Republic of Letters

Amelander's professional career developed within the world of the Amsterdam Jewish printing industry, and this is a crucial element in his biography. In the seventeenth century the center of printing in Europe had shifted from Venice to Amsterdam, the new economic and commercial center of the continent. The city's relatively liberal policies and mild censorship practices made it the optimal location for book printing, both on the national and, most importantly, international markets.²⁴⁰ The Jewish printing industry, which had started in association with Christian printers but soon became controlled by several independent Sephardic and Ashkenazi publishers, also moved from Italy and Poland to Amsterdam in the seventeenth century. A network of authors, printers, editors, correctors, book sellers and buyers existed around the publishers. The printing houses often also served as book shops; moreover, they offered 'secular spaces' – contrasting the traditional religious spaces of the batei ha-midrash and yeshivot - where Jewish intellectuals could meet in a open and non-hierarchical atmosphere.²⁴¹

Each book project that Amelander worked on involved cooperation among several people, including editors, correctors, publishers and financiers. Sometimes these functions were all carried out by one or two persons. No matter how important Hebrew and Yiddish printing in Amsterdam had become, it remained a relatively small branch of the overall printing industry. Indeed, everyone in Amsterdam involved in it seems to have know each other.²⁴² Frankfurter, for example, not only edited and published books, sometimes by himself and sometimes together with others, but also, as *dayyan*, wrote *haskamot* for books published by other printers. Survival in the book industry necessitated that one would work for more than one printing firm. Amelander worked for Frankfurter and Proops, and his Hebrew Torah edition, *Shevet Musar* and historical books were printed by Naphtali Herz Rofe.

²⁴⁰ Van Eijnatten, 'Communicatie en publieke orde', 355-362.

²⁴¹ Zeev Gries, 'Expanding horizons' in: idem, *The book in the Jewish world 1700-1900* (Oxford/Portland, Oregon 2007) 13-19; Jean Baumgarten, *Le peuple des livres. Les ouvrages populaires dans la société ashkénaze XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris 2010) 24-26.

²⁴² Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'The role of Yiddish in early Dutch-Jewish Haskalah' in: Berger ao. Eds., *Speaking Jewish*, 147-155.

Avriel Bar-Levav has stressed the importance of Amsterdam in the inception of a Jewish ‘republic of letters’. This sixteenth-century humanistic notion of an autonomous socio-cultural space of a group of people producing and consuming literature, resulting in shared knowledge of specific texts and ideas, is, within Jewish history, generally linked to the Haskalah movement. Bar-Levav, however, demonstrates that in Amsterdam an early, formative phase of such a Jewish republic of letters developed around the printing houses, where books were published for a widening audience, and that this was followed by the growth of a Jewish imagined community which shared this Amsterdam heritage and further developed it.²⁴³

Examining Amelander’s publication projects allows us to further develop Bar-Levav’s thesis. What differentiates the early eighteenth-century Amsterdam ‘republic of letters’ from the later maskilic ‘republic of letters’ is that the former’s library remained largely traditional. Its intended readership, however, was much larger than ever before and crossed the boundaries of traditional knowledge societies. Amelander’s publications, as a whole, testify to a specific type of a Jewish library awareness; each project, in some way or another, was intended to make the central texts of the Jewish tradition - including the Bible, the prayer book, the Haggadah, ancient midrashim and the *Zohar* - better known within the Ashkenazi world. Amelander worked on an ‘imaginary Jewish library’ of traditional books, but made them fully available, in contemporary editions, to a broad audience.

Yet there appears to have been a purposive differentiation between the books directed at a Yiddish-reading public (the volumes of *Magishei Minbah* and *Sefer ha-Magid*) and those intended for the much smaller, primarily male-dominated audience trained in Hebrew (*Kehillot Moshe*, *Sefer Abudraham*, *Shevet Musar*, *Midrash Tanbuma*, the 1735 Torah edition and *Reshit Hokhma*). This differentiation was not coincidental. Amelander – as well as his colleagues, publishers and financiers – must have considered it highly important that certain texts – such as the Bible, and the principal insights of the classical exegetical tradition as expressed in its accompanying commentaries, – be known to as large a public as possible, but that certain other, more difficult texts remain reserved for people with ample training in Hebrew. Amelander’s Hebrew publications, developing the traditional rabbinic library, gained him recognition from the rabbinic elites. His efforts to spread central religious texts to larger strata of the Jewish communities should, for their part, be interpreted as an offshoot of the age of confessionalization of European societies, a time when various religions sought to connect

²⁴³ Avriel Bar-Levav, ‘Amsterdam and the inception of the Jewish republic of letters’ in: Kaplan, *Dutch intersection*, 225-237.

the common man to a new and higher level of religiosity.²⁴⁴ The same awareness of differentiation was, as we will see in the chapter ‘Mediating knowledge’, important for Amelander in editing *Sheyris Yisroel* as well.

Older historiography often describes Amsterdam, as a center of Jewish printing, as having been important only in the more technical aspects of book production and that the books published in the city had not presented any significant local intellectual contributions. The city’s Jewish printing industry, according to such historiography, centered almost exclusively around importing texts and exporting books. Shlomo Berger altered this picture by showing Amsterdam to have been an intellectual laboratory for the Ashkenazic diaspora. According to Berger, in Amsterdam not only were imported texts discussed, checked, altered and rewritten, but Hebrew and Yiddish texts were written there as well and subsequently printed and distributed.²⁴⁵ Amelander’s activity as an editor, corrector and author were typical of this process. His main methodology involved composing new editions of traditional texts by selecting material from different sources and placing them in a new order. In doing so, Amelander became familiar with the procedure of collecting diverse sources, selecting from them and unifying the selected elements into a new narrative – skills he would extensively apply while composing his *magnum opus*, *Sheyris Yisroel*.

In many of the book projects in which he was involved, Amelander was the person to correct the language and to add explanations of difficult words and concepts. He explicitly noted that he used, to a great extent, the traditional linguistic sources, like the *Arukh*, just as the often philological remarks of Rashi. Because of this, Amelander himself became known as *ba-medakdek*, the grammarian, an authority on the peculiarities of the Hebrew language.²⁴⁶ This special connection to Hebrew did not prevent him from using Yiddish. Amelander was far from elitist, and in many of his publishing activities he showed how important it was for him to reach not just the rabbinic elite but also the Yiddish-speaking majority of the community. In fact, as Irene Zwiép has demonstrated, a ‘grammarian’ in the eighteenth century was ‘a new,

²⁴⁴ Reinhard Wolfgang, ‘Sozialdisziplinierung - Konfessionalisierung - Modernisierung: Ein historiographischer Diskurs’ in: Nada Boskovka Leimgruber, *Die Frühe Neuzeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft: Forschungstendenzen und Forschungsbeiträge* (Paderborn etc. 1997) 39-55; Peter van Rooden, ‘Kerk en religie in het confessionele tijdperk’ in: Willem Frijhoff and Leo Wessels eds., *Veelvormige dynamiek: Europa in het ancien régime 1450-1800* (Heerlen 2006) 373-402. Commonly the age of confessionalization is periodised from 1555 until 1649, in recent years this final date is much debated. For the early eighteenth-century Jewish case the concept, at least, is still well applicable.

²⁴⁵ Shlomo Berger, ‘Yiddish book production in Amsterdam between 1650-1800: local and international aspects’ in: Kaplan, *Dutch intersection*, 203-212.

²⁴⁶ On the title page of the 1749 *Hamishah humshei Torah* edition Amelander was introduced as the *torani*, Torah scholar, and *ba-medakdek*, grammarian. This qualification was adopted hereafter in other republications of Amelander’s work.

professional, identity', and one that entailed having a mediating position in a multilingual setting.²⁴⁷ Amelander joined this new trend in Ashkenazi society, while at the same time connecting to traditional linguistic sources. This hybrid mixture of innovation and tradition was characteristic for the eighteenth-century type of Jewish intellectual Amelander was.

The Amsterdam Jewish printing industry served as a semi-neutral society for Sephardim and Ashkenazim; here they could meet and collaborate and thereby become part of the same 'republic of letters'.²⁴⁸ Amsterdam's peculiarity in being home to two distinct Jewish communities, each of which had its own religious, philosophical and scholarly heritage, become even further pronounced in the printing industry. The formal borders between the communities were accentuated by their respective religious establishments, yet there were significant mutual influences. The famous Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Amsterdam, Haham Zvi (1656-1718), offers a useful example of the enormous impact that encounters with Sephardic culture had on Ashkenazi intellectuals. Indeed, Zvi's intellectual horizon became predominantly Sephardic and he made severe criticisms on the Ashkenazi education system.²⁴⁹ The printing industry was one of the main spaces where the transition of knowledge from the Sephardic to the Ashkenazi domain occurred, a transition resulting in a new fabric of eighteenth-century Ashkenazi identity.

Amelander was always highly conscious of his mainly Ashkenazi reading public, yet he was also intimately familiar with the Sephardic tradition. His list of publications can easily be read as having been an attempt to introduce the main texts from this tradition into the Ashkenazi communities. *Sefer Abudraham*, *Reshit Hokehama* and *Shevet Musar* were all originally written by Sephardic authors for a Sephardic public, and *Kehillot Moshe* included much Sephardic commentary. Likewise, the fact that Sephardic rabbis recommended certain books that Amelander had worked on demonstrated – despite the social and cultural gaps between the communities – the high degree of exchange between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in eighteenth-century Amsterdam.

²⁴⁷ Irene E. Zwiap, 'Imagined speech communities: western Ashkenazi multilingualism as reflected in eighteenth-century grammars of Hebrew' in: Shlomo Berger, Aubrey Pomerance, Andrea Schatz and Emile Schrijver eds., *Speaking Jewish – Jewish speak. Multilingualism in western Ashkenazi culture* [Studia Rosenthaliana 36] (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA 2003) 77-117, there 94-95, 115-117.

²⁴⁸ The concept of a 'semi-neutral society' originates with Jacob Katz, *Out of the ghetto. The social background of Jewish emancipation 1770-1870* (Cambridge Mass. 1973) 42-56; Bar-Levav, 'Inception', 235-236.

²⁴⁹ Schorsch, *Text and context*, 73.

4.7 The early 'emancipation' of Yiddish

One further aspect of Amelander's works merits specific attention. In addition to Hebrew books, he also collaborated on two Yiddish projects, *Magisbei minbah* and *Sefer ha-magid*. Yiddish, being the daily vernacular of Ashkenazim, had acquired in Amsterdam a stable position with the growth of the Ashkenazi kehilla. The printing industry, moreover, served not only – or even firstly – the Amsterdam Ashkenazim but primarily the Ashkenazi diaspora. The printing of Yiddish books had begun elsewhere, before Amsterdam had acquired its central position in the industry, yet in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Amsterdam the social position of Yiddish - and subsequently Yiddish books - changed in a way that can be identified as having been a gradual early 'emancipation' of the Yiddish language. This cultural shift occurred roughly a century before Yiddish in Eastern Europe developed as a literary language.²⁵⁰

For a long time, most of the historiography of Yiddish primarily devoted attention to either the supposed beginnings of Yiddish in medieval Germany or to the further development of the language in Eastern Europe since early modern times. The major turning point in this history was for these historians the construction of a Yiddish literary language, often dated somewhere between the 1860s and 1880s. Before, Yiddish was primarily a spoken language, with some literature on its own, mainly for women and illiterate, and largely in the shadows of Hebrew.²⁵¹ In this grand narrative Western Yiddish barely gets any attention, as it is considered to be a dead end alley. Illustrative is Benjamin Harshav's assertion that, although Yiddish existed already some 700 years, 'it still seemed to lack beauty in comparison with the literatures of Europe, and sublimity in comparison with biblical Hebrew', and therefore in the last 100 years, Yiddish authors – mainly in Eastern Europe – had 'to create and enrich both their language and their literature as if they were just beginning'.²⁵² He completely overlooked the developments in Western Yiddish from 1500 onwards, and even stressed that 'only the

²⁵⁰ Rena G. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'The role of Yiddish in early Dutch-Jewish Haskalah' in: Berger, *Speaking Jewish*, 147-155; Shlomo Berger, *Yiddish and Jewish modernization in the 18th century* [Hebrew; Braun Lectures in the history of the Jews in Prussia 12] (Ramat-Gan 2006).

²⁵¹ Mikhail Krutikov, *From kabbalah to class struggle. Expressionism, Marxism and Yiddish literature in the life and work of Meir Wiener* (Stanford 2011) 288-291; Barry Trachtenberg, *The revolutionary roots of modern Yiddish, 1903-1917* (Syracuse, NY 2008), analyzes the ideology behind the Yiddish research of Shmuel Niger, Ber Borochov, Nokhem Shtif – who paid attention to early modern Yiddish, but largely overlooked the importance of Amsterdam and even described the eighteenth century as a period of decline (133).

²⁵² Benjamin Harshav, *The meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley 1990) 4; see as well the following pages for the swift transfer from medieval Ashkenaz to modern Eastern Europe.

particular historical and sociological position of Jews in Eastern Europe' was able to develop and guarantee 'the independent life of the language'.²⁵³

What then, is it that causes many linguists and historians to look almost exclusively to nineteenth century Eastern Europe for the development of a literary Yiddish? Harshav provides two clues. First, it was then that Yiddish was standardized and 'one, superdialectal, literary language' was forged.²⁵⁴ Second, Yiddish was a companion to the rise of Jewish nationalism and only then could fully develop into a language of the people.²⁵⁵ Others, from a Marxist or socialist ideology instead of a nationalistic, assumed that Yiddish only developed into a full-fledged language with the rise of political awareness of the Jewish proletariat.²⁵⁶ A fourth claim is made, namely the rise of a new intelligentsia, which expressed itself in Yiddish.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, a new, large Yiddish readership would account for the 'emancipation' of Yiddish.²⁵⁸ Finally, the argument has been made that until the 1860's Yiddish was not only subjected to Hebrew, but also largely – next to Hebrew - the language for religious books, while nearly no secular books were written. Haskalah, in this case, is considered as a prerequisite for the 'emancipation' of Yiddish.²⁵⁹

It seems that ideological backgrounds, to say the least, influenced these authors significantly in their historiography of Yiddish, whether nationalist, Marxist or secularist.²⁶⁰ Their concentration on Eastern Europe and the nineteenth century prevented them from considering the rich history of Western Yiddish in early modern times. Many of the arguments used for the nineteenth-century Eastern European 'emancipation' of Yiddish, could be applied to early modern Yiddish as well. The Amsterdam publishers already created a Standard Yiddish, supposedly devoid of dialectisms; Yiddish was consciously used by a new intelligentsia, while also a new, quickly broadening readership was available. The suggestions of Schaechter and Jacobs to distinguish between two Yiddish literary languages, one mainly developed in early modern Amsterdam, and the other later in nineteenth-century Eastern

²⁵³ Harshav, *Meaning of Yiddish*, 30.

²⁵⁴ Harshav, *Meaning of Yiddish*, 80; Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish culture. The story of the Yiddish language movement* (New York 2000) 45.

²⁵⁵ Harshav, *Meaning of Yiddish*, 121-160; Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish culture*, 51-52.

²⁵⁶ On this view: David E. Fishman, *The rise of modern Yiddish culture* (Pittsburgh, PA 2005) vii. Although there were also Marxist and socialist historians who turned to early modern Yiddish as a true language of the masses, e.g. Ber Borochov; cf. Trachtenberg, *Revolutionary roots*, 129-133.

²⁵⁷ Fishman, *Rise of modern Yiddish culture*, viii.

²⁵⁸ Fishman, *Rise of modern Yiddish culture*, vii.

²⁵⁹ Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish culture*, 278-279; cf. the position of Chaim Zhitlovsky, in: Fishman, *Rise of modern Yiddish culture*, viii-ix.

²⁶⁰ More on this theme: Frakes, *Politics of interpretation*, passim.

Europe, seem to do more justice to the actual history of Yiddish. The first phase might in the end have been a dead end alley - although Schaechter is keen enough to stress its influence on the second phase - it was nevertheless a significant development in early modern Ashkenaz.²⁶¹ Amelander was right in the middle of this process in which the status of Yiddish gradually changed.

The first Yiddish book published in Amsterdam, *Mismor lethode*, was issued in 1644. The work was written by David ben Menahem ha-Kohen and comprised rhymed translations of stories from Torah and Megillot.²⁶² Thereafter, the number of Yiddish books published in the city grew rapidly, and no less than 500 titles were printed there, many of which were republished. Genres that in medieval times had been reserved for the Yiddish domain and aimed at female audiences made up a large proportion of books now printed in Yiddish. Such works included the paraphrase of the Bible, the *Tsene-Rene*, minhagim books, female prayer books such as *Tekhines*, books of fables, *mayse* books and other publications with popular Jewish or non-Jewish folk stories.²⁶³ Towards the end of the seventeenth century new genres had entered the Yiddish library. For example, in Amsterdam two Yiddish translations of the Bible were printed almost simultaneously; and in 1680 another classical text, the *piyyut Keter malkhut*, by Shlomo ibn Gabirol, made the transition from the Hebrew (and Sephardic) domain to the Yiddish (and Ashkenazi) domain.²⁶⁴

A number of Amsterdam publishers played crucial roles in this early 'emancipation' of Yiddish. The driving force behind the publication of new texts, which until then had been reserved for those who could read Hebrew, was Hayyim ben Jacob Drukker. From 1690 onwards he published Yiddish translations of among others Menasseh ben Israel's *Mikveh Yisrael*, Benjamin of Tudela's travelogue and *Lev hakhamim*. Drukker hired Moses Frankfurter for a Yiddish edition of the Sephardic ethics classic *Menorat hama'or* (Candelabra of light) of Isaac Aboab – the same book that Eleasar Soesman had translated into Dutch. In 1722 the

²⁶¹ Mordkhe Schaechter, 'The 'hidden standard'. A study in competing influences in standardization'in: Marvin I. Herzog, Wita Ravid and Uriel Weinreich eds., *Field of Yiddish* 3 ('s-Gravenhage/Mouton 1969) 284-304; Neil G. Jacobs, *Yiddish: a linguistic introduction* (Cambridge 2005) 297-299. Cf. Dov-Ber Kerler, *The origins of modern literary Yiddish* (Oxford 1999), which gives some attention to the earlier literary language, but concentrates in his book completely on the later, Eastern European phase.

²⁶² Simon Neuberg, 'The first Yiddish book printed in Amsterdam: Sefer mismor lethode', *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 4 (2010) 1, 7-21.

²⁶³ Lejb Fuks, 'Amsterdam, a yidisher literatur-tsenter in 17tn un 18tn yohrhundert', *Di Goldene Keyt* 115 (1985) 183-194.

²⁶⁴ Marion Aptroot, 'Blitz and Witzhausen. New aspects of an old conflict' [Yiddish], *Oksforder Yidish* 1 (1990) 3-38; idem, 'In galkhes they do not say so, but the taytsh is as it stands here.' Notes on the Amsterdam Yiddish Bible translations by Blitz and Witzhausen', *Studia Rosenthaliana* 27 (1993) 1/2, 136-158; Baumgarten, *Le peuple des livres*, 26-27.

edition was published by Drukker, with a preface by Frankfurter, in which he defended the publication of serious religious books into Yiddish.²⁶⁵

The preface of Frankfurter is both an apology and a program. Referring to Deuteronomy 4, 6 he states that just as the nations are required to hear the commandments of God in their own languages, so too – and even more so – the Jews should be able to read and study Torah in the vernacular.²⁶⁶ Frankfurter notes: ‘Three reasons, therefore, are there why these matters are written in the general simple language [Yiddish]: they have the right to understand, consequently the right to know the truth and thereafter they can ensure their eternal life.’ Frankfurter’s argument, stressing the connection between learning and eternal life, clearly echoes contemporary Christian confessionalisation offensives which also linked proper religious knowledge to salvation.²⁶⁷ Frankfurter then challenges the opposition within the rabbinic establishment against the transfer of religious knowledge from Hebrew to Yiddish: ‘I heard that there are scholars who believe it is wrong to translate such books into the language of Ashkenaz and publicize matters that are written in *midrash* and Talmud. Thus, I would like to show them the contrary. It is a duty to publish books in all languages, so that a person who knows no Hebrew can study in his own language and will be rewarded exactly in the same way as students in Hebrew [...].’ The Ashkenazi Amsterdam chief rabbi, however, supported the project and gave his *haskama*; most likely, Frankfurter also defended the Yiddish agenda against Ashkenazi scholars in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁶⁸

Drukker and Frankfurter were not alone in their efforts to provide new titles to the widening circle of Yiddish readers, be they women or men, educated or uneducated. People like Rabbi Yehiel Mikhel Epstein were active in writing Yiddish books on religious customs and prayer for the same reasons Frankfurter was.²⁶⁹ The networks around Drukker and Frankfurter, in which Amelander should be situated as well, were inspired by the Yiddish agenda of the publishers and participated in the explosion of Yiddish literature in many new

²⁶⁵ Jacques Zwarts, ‘Drukker, Chajiem ben Jacob’, *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* 7 (Leiden 1927) 387-388; Shlomo Berger, ‘An invitation to buy and to read. Paratexts of Yiddish books in Amsterdam, 1650-1800’, *Book History* 7 (2004) 31-61, there 48-53.

²⁶⁶ A similar defense of Yiddish, although much shorter and less elaborated, is given in R. Zvi Hirsh Khotsh’s Yiddish translation of the *Zohar* in 1711; Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish culture*, 35.

²⁶⁷ Heike Bock, ‘Secularization of the modern conduct of life? Reflections on religiousness in early modern Europe’ in: Manuel Franzmann, Christel Gärtner, Nicole Köck eds., *Religiosität in der sekulierten Welt. Theoretische und empirische Beiträge zur Säkularisierungsdebatte in der Religionssoziologie* (Wiesbaden 2006) 143-152.

²⁶⁸ Cited after: Berger, ‘Invitation’, 48-49.

²⁶⁹ Zeev Gries, ‘On reading and readers’ in: idem, *Jewish book*, 31; Shlomo Noble, ‘R. Yehiel Mikhel Epstein, a dertsier un kemfer far yidish in 17^m yorhundert’, *Yivo bleter* 35 (1951) 121-138.

genres.²⁷⁰ Frankfurter himself edited a Yiddish translation of the mahzor, the prayer book for festive days, and Amelander worked with Frankfurter, Eleasar Soesman and Naphtali Herz Rofe on a Yiddish commentary of the Bible. Amelander's historical works, which will be examined in the next chapters, offer another example of a new genre being transferred from the Hebrew to the Yiddish domain.

The growing appreciation of Yiddish and the changing borders between Hebrew and Yiddish were strongly connected to Amsterdam.²⁷¹ First, the Sephardim, since their arrival in Amsterdam, had been publishing in Hebrew and the Iberian languages. They were also active in translating Hebrew classics into Spanish and Portuguese. The Ashkenazi printers were well aware of these Sephardic publishing practices and often benefited from them in their own professional training. Drukker, for example, worked in the printing press of David Tartas, a Sephardic Jew, before establishing his own printing house. Both Frankfurter and Drukker, in their respective prefaces to *Menorat hama'or*, referred explicitly to the Sephardic translation projects of Hebrew books.²⁷² Second, in the Dutch Republic publishing in the vernacular – including for serious and scholarly works – was far more common than in the rest of Europe, where Latin remained the dominant scholarly language. This 'vernacularization of learning' resulted in the production of 'scholarly' texts in the vernacular in genres like historiography, philosophy, theology, geography, medicine, biology, mathematics and grammar.²⁷³ The Dutch appreciation of the vernacular, next to the Sephardic tradition of translating seminal Hebrew texts, provide the necessary background to understand the rise of new genres and new titles in Yiddish.

More general considerations also stimulated the transfer of knowledge from the Hebrew to the Yiddish domain. Since the onset of book printing, around 1450, until 1800 books had gradually become more available to wider circles of society. Such widening availability was primarily due to improving trade techniques, which facilitated mass printing and thereby made books less expensive and more accessible to a larger public. Buying books

²⁷⁰ Bar-Levav, *Concept of death*, 264-265, 303-325; Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'The role of Yiddish in early Dutch-Jewish Haskalah' in: Berger, *Speaking Jewish*, 147-155.

²⁷¹ Cf. Irene E. Zwiep, 'Adding the reader's voice: early-modern Ashkenazi grammars of Hebrew', *Science in Context* 20 (2007) 2, 163-195.

²⁷² Zwartz, 'Drukker'; Berger, 'Invitation to buy and read', 48-50.

²⁷³ Arjan van Dixhoorn, 'Chambers of rhetoric: performative culture and literary sociability in the early modern Northern Netherlands' in: idem and Susie Speakman Sutch eds., *The reach of the Republic of Letters: literary and learned societies in the late medieval and early modern Europe I* (Leiden etc. 2008) 119-157; Ernestine van der Wall, 'The religious context of the early Dutch Enlightenment: moral religion and society' in: Wiep van Bunge ed., *The early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750: selected papers of a conference, held at the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel 22-23 March 2001* (Leiden etc. 2003) 39-58, there 43-44; Fuks, 1981, 175.

was no longer the privilege of an educated elite who were fluent in Hebrew, but also of Yiddish-speaking middle-class readers.²⁷⁴ Commercial motives, of course, also spurred publishers to release new titles in Yiddish translation. Via publishing in Yiddish they sought to reach new sectors of the Ashkenazic public and to add them as a market for their products. Publishers targeted both the steadily growing local Amsterdam market and the large Ashkenazic communities of Central and Eastern Europe.²⁷⁵

The efforts of people like Drukker, Frankfurter and Amelander led to new kinds of books being supplied to a new type of readership, which, as Bar-Levav has noted, resulted in a redefinition of the imagined Jewish community.²⁷⁶ More specifically, this imagined community was transnational, European-wide and Ashkenazi, with a bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish library. New texts and knowledge were introduced from Sephardic culture, and Yiddish obtained an expanding position next to Hebrew as a language of culture and education. By the end of the eighteenth century one would be able to read in Yiddish translation almost all the Hebrew classics, whether envisioned to be read next to or even instead of the original texts.²⁷⁷ Amelander contributed to this process not only via his publications until 1743, but also through his history books, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The history books, next to genres such as the Yiddish press, poetry and pamphlets, demonstrate furthermore that Yiddish literature in this period was not only limited to religious genres and themes. Although early modern culture was thoroughly religious, and therefore Yiddish literary output was also for a significant part religious, it was in the flexible, quickly developing Yiddish domain instead of the more stable Hebrew domain that more secular and new genres entered.

The early ‘emancipation’ of Yiddish differed in many respects from the later, Eastern European literary Yiddish. Within the context of early modern Europe, Yiddish, however, went through a process very similar to other European vernaculars. Knowledge – although not all - was transferred from domains considered to be ‘high culture’, new genres were introduced, the authors were no longer primarily part of the rabbinic establishment and much larger strata of the population were reached. The relationship with Hebrew remained close, as both functioned with a bilingual community, but Yiddish textual culture acquired a growing position

²⁷⁴ Bar-Levav, ‘Inception’, 236.

²⁷⁵ Berger, ‘Yiddish book production’, 205, 210; Baumgarten, *Le peuple des livres*, 36.

²⁷⁶ Bar-Levav, ‘Inception’, 236-237.

²⁷⁷ Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish culture*, 35.

within Ashkenazi culture and functioned – in Baumgarten’s words – as a ‘laboratoire d’observation des changements intervenus à l’époque prémoderne’.²⁷⁸

4.8 Conclusion: Amelander as a hybrid intellectual

Thus far we have examined Amelander’s family, education and professional career in the Amsterdam printing industry. In conclusion we will summarize these findings and situate them within the larger picture of early modern Jewish history. Amelander came from a family that had been in Amsterdam for at least one generation, and this may well have given Amelander a good start, or at least a far better start than was available to most recent immigrants. His parents were buried at Muiderberg, indicating that they had almost surely belonged to the Ashkenazi middle class. Amelander married into the Rudelsum family, an established Amsterdam Ashkenazi family who were linked to the religious establishment. These family networks proved to be important for the development of Amelander’s professional career.

Amelander received far more education than did the average Amsterdam Ashkenazi boy of his age. He studied, in both Amsterdam and Prague, with well-known rabbinic authorities such as Moses Frankfurter and David Oppenheim. His geographic mobility was typical both for the Ashkenazi yeshiva educational system and for eighteenth-century Jewish intellectuals. Amelander grew up as part of a transnational Ashkenazi society, and thus was introduced in traditional Hebrew rabbinic knowledge.

In Amsterdam Amelander belonged to a network of Jewish intellectuals who shared a specific agenda. His brother-in-law Eleasar Soesman was crossing borders with Christian society, not least by publishing in Dutch, Hebrew and Yiddish, and by polemicizing with Christian intellectuals and strengthening Amsterdam Jews’ profound religious knowledge. Amelander developed his career within the printing industry, supported by Moses Frankfurter, whose Yiddish agenda he helped further by editing Yiddish Biblecommentaries and editions. The list of publications on which Amelander assisted form a significant part of a consistent, traditional Jewish library. Amelander functioned as part of the rising Jewish republic of letters and helped shape a new, reinvented Ashkenazi community.

The Amsterdam context was highly significant for Amelander’s development. Here Sephardim and Ashkenazim lived side by side and challenged each other intellectually. The

²⁷⁸ Baumgarten, *Le peuple des livres*, 14.

printing industry functioned as a semi-neutral society, where Sephardim and Ashkenazim collaborated, debated and transferred knowledge over the boundaries of (until then) fixed ethnic and religious identities. Amelander was quite active in the transfer of Sephardic knowledge to the Ashkenazi domain. Sephardim likewise influenced Ashkenazim in using the vernacular, just as Dutch society did. This resulted in what can be considered as having been an early or first 'emancipation' of Yiddish.

The publications Amelander worked on could be divided in two related, but different bodies. The first part, his Hebrew publications, are part of the traditional rabbinic library, which was extended by new Sephardi publications, but remained strictly within the Hebrew domain. The second part, in Yiddish, on the other hand, could be characterized as being part of a much larger offensive to spread religious and moral knowledge among large parts of Ashkenazi communities, mainly by the intelligentsia operating just below the rabbinic elite in spaces like the book industry. The publications – most of them key texts - were made reader-friendly, explaining difficult words, adding indices and deleting difficult passages, in order to disseminate religious knowledge and to intensify religious and moral conduct. The new library for a new, enlarged readership had an implicit or sometimes even explicit agenda of disciplining eighteenth century Ashkenazim.

During his professional career Amelander had different functions in the book industry, he was proofreader, corrector and editor, and finally became an author himself. In the process he learnt how to present traditional texts in a new, modern outlook to new audiences. He learned to assemble existing material, ordering this in a new format, correcting and reworking the language, explaining difficult words and passages and making new additions. All these skills – partly medieval, partly new trends in the early modern book industry – he would use extensively while composing *Sheyris Yisroel*.

Where should Amelander be positioned in the landscape of eighteenth century Ashkenazi Jewry? The answer to this question is not that easy at first sight. Should he be labeled an early maskil, per Feiner's terminology? Although Amelander shared certain characteristics of these early eighteenth-century Jewish intellectuals - such as Sephardic influences, openness towards surrounding society, and working outside the rabbinic establishment - there were also significant differences. Amelander's publications do not deal with science or philosophy, and he voices little if any criticism of traditional knowledge and traditional religious elites. Some figures in Amelander's network, such as Eleasar Soesman or Naphtali Herz Rofe (the latter will be highlighted in the next chapter) can perhaps be included

in the transnational network of early maskilim, though Rofe would seem to have been too traditional to be included in this network.

On the other hand, Amelander could also not be seen as a mere representative of the rabbinic establishment, which continued traditional learning patterns. Although he contributed significantly to the traditional Hebrew library, with new and enlarged editions of central texts to be used in batei ha-midrash and yeshivot, his work was not restricted to that domain. Moreover, he never acquired a stable position within the religious infrastructure of Jewish Amsterdam, despite his solid yeshiva training, but instead found refuge in the relatively new and dynamic branch of the book industry.

A more useful and effective concept for describing Amelander, and most of his colleagues and family members, would be that of a hybrid intellectual. This concept is used in post-colonial discourses to describe intellectuals who were positioned between white ruling classes and indigenous communities. It is, however, also used for the blending or mixing of traditional and modern cultural practices and ideas.²⁷⁹ Hybridity as a concept has been used extensively in biology, linguistics, literary analysis and philosophy, with varying degrees of success. ‘Social hybridity’ has only recently started to be applied on historical contexts, including the history of Jews. Its merits are that it points to the dynamic multiplicity beyond normative ideals, to processes in which a diversity of sources, ideas and ideals fuse together. Homi Bhabha characterized this pointedly: ‘This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’.²⁸⁰ In the strict context of colonial discourses it is always connected to operations of power, privilege and interest, in framing and discriminating the ‘Other’. Outside this context, however, ‘social hybridity’ – as demonstrated by Peter Burke – has developed in a much broader concept, not limited to hierarchical contexts, which is very helpful to analyse the dynamics of cultures. We should, nevertheless, be aware that hybridity is

²⁷⁹ See the influential book of Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity* (Minneapolis MN 1995), for the concept see esp. the introduction; a general survey of the development of the theory of hybridity is given in: Deborah A. Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong, ‘Theorizing the hybrid’, *The Journal of American Folklore* 112 (1999) 239-253; it is applied extensively in Latin American studies, e.g. in: Anne Lambricht, *Creating the hybrid intellectual: subject, space, and the feminine in the narrative of José María Arguedas* (Lewisburg 2007); in the field of Jewish history the concept is introduced for Late Antiquity Judaism in: Daniel Boyarin, *Border lines. The partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia 2004) 15-22.

²⁸⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture* (London 1994) 38.

an ‘outsider concept’, used by the historian, which describes changes of which communities and individuals are themselves often unaware.²⁸¹

If we avoid both a linear, progressive perspective on the rise of modernity and a simple dichotomy between the traditional and modern, the second meaning of the concept of hybridity, describing the blending and mixing of ‘traditional’ (rabbinic), ‘modern’, Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Christian cultural expressions, can be effectively applied to eighteenth-century Amsterdam Ashkenazim like Amelander. Hybridity relativizes and dissolves such binarisms, and stresses specific spaces which are ‘neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between’.²⁸²

According to Benjamin Lee such spaces are often created by diasporic migrations and inhabited by bilingual and bicultural resident nomads.²⁸³ Burke, in turn, emphasizes the importance of the cosmopolitan metropolis, like early modern Amsterdam, on the cross-roads of trade and cultures, with a very diverse population. In such spaces hybridic forms of cultures develop, especially in ‘trading zones’ or ‘frontier areas’, where people from different backgrounds and cultures meet and exchange information and knowledge.²⁸⁴

Amelander, functioning in cosmopolitan Amsterdam within the spatial realm of the book industry, one such ‘trading zone’, was part of a steadily growing diasporic community and multilingual (he had a command of Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish and Dutch). Although the term ‘resident nomad’ is definitely too strong a word, and does not do justice to Amsterdam Ashkenazim’s attachment to the city, Amelander was definitely hybrid in combining a traditional worldview and library awareness with innovative approaches, (such as targeting new audiences), the changing status of Yiddish and the openness to Sephardic and non-Jewish knowledge. Although he was not part of the rabbinic establishment and did not criticize it, he sought to include the broader Yiddish-reading public in the world of traditional Jewish knowledge. Amelander’s fusion of Sephardic knowledge in an Ashkenazi context could be described as intra-Jewish cultural hybridity, while the translation and reworking of Dutch

²⁸¹ Peter Burke, *Social hybridity* (Cambridge/Malden, MA 2009); Robert C. Young, *Colonial desire. Hybridity in theory, culture and race* (London/New York 1995). Moshe Rosman has criticized the application of the theory of hybridity for early modern Jewry, mainly because of the different organizational and social structures in colonial contexts. I agree with him that the concept should be used with ‘due diligence’ and is only selectively operative, but most of his reservations are met with in Burke’s contextualization of ‘social hybridity’ in the domain of history; Moshe Rosman, ‘Hybrid with what? The variable contexts of Polish Jewish culture: their implications for Jewish cultural history and Jewish studies’ in: Anita Norich and Yaron Z. Eliav eds., *Jewish literatures and cultures. Context and text* (Providence, PI 2008) 129-154.

²⁸² Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 219.

²⁸³ Benjamin Lee, ‘Going public’, *Public culture* 5 (1993) 165-178, esp. 174.

²⁸⁴ Burke, *Social hybridity*, 72-76.

material – as we will encounter in *Sheyris Yisroel* – is a specimen of cultural hybridity with a dominant culture.²⁸⁵

Amelander, unlike the early maskilim, was not an intellectual ahead of his time; yet his cultural hybridity was typical of many Jewish intellectuals in the eighteenth century. Although scholarly attention is most often directed at innovative thinkers, the first traces of enlightenment or modernity, in Amelander we encounter a prototype of a fully contemporary, Ashkenazi intellectual, who, via the book projects on which he collaborated, exerted significant influence on Ashkenazi readers during the eighteenth century. Amelander's case highlights for us that the eighteenth century, rather than just the end of the Jewish Middle Ages or the beginning of Jewish modernity, should be qualified as one of those periods of particular intense hybridization, as a consequence of many and varied cultural encounters (traditional/modern, Hebrew/Yiddish, Sephardic/Ashkenazi, Jewish/Christian).²⁸⁶ The next chapter will demonstrate that this hybrid context left its marks on Amelander's history writing.

²⁸⁵ Here it should be noted that hybridity as concept avoids the 'inherent weakness of explanatory models that turn culture into static binary encounters, characterized by conflict, resistance, influence, assimilation, acculturation or appropriation'. Instead, it sees Jews as 'subjective agents fully embedded within their cultural environments'; Michael L. Satlow, 'Beyond influence. Toward a new historiographic paradigm' in: Norich and Eliav, *Jewish literatures and cultures*, 37-53.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Burke, *Cultural hybridity*, 66.