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van der Veen, S.

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Reappraising the history of the Jews in the Netherlands, edited by Hans Blom, David J. Wertheim, Hetty Berg, and Bart T. Wallet, translated by David McKay, London, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with Liverpool University Press, 2021, 578 pp., £60 (hardback), ISBN 9781786941879

Twenty years after the publication of its predecessor, *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, this book, like its Dutch-language counterpart (published 2017), sets out to present a new, thoroughly rewritten reference work, which integrates recent scholarship and seeks to place the history of Dutch Jewry in a more international context. Central to this approach are several theoretical developments, including the economic turn as well

as the imperial turn – although not yet labelled as such – in Jewish history, and research that has blurred boundaries between, among other things, Sephardim and Ashkenazim, Dutch Jews and Jews in other countries, and Jews and non-Jews.

Starting with the scarcely documented Jewish life in medieval times (Ben M. J. Speet), when Jews settled in the – mainly southern and eastern – Low Countries in small numbers, and were forced to flee these lands again in waves of differing intensity, the book moves to the period of the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period (Daniel M. Swetschinski). During the sixteenth century, the few Jews in what is now the Netherlands lived on the whims and graces of local authorities and suffered frequent expulsion in times of unrest. With the arrival of the first *conversos* from the Iberian peninsula, and the creation of the Dutch Republic, the focus of the book gradually shifts to the province of Holland, and, more specifically, the city of Amsterdam. In two separate chapters on the period between 1639 and 1750, about Jewish demographics and economic activity (Jonathan I. Israel) and Jewish socio-cultural and religious life (Yosef Kaplan), the “unique position” of Dutch Jewry, “atypical of Jewish history in the wider sense” (75), takes centre stage. The Sephardi as well as the Ashkenazi communities became established, and, as described in the next chapter about Jewish life during the relatively under-researched eighteenth century (Irene E. Zwiép), “part of the fabric” (189) of Amsterdam. Throughout the rest of the Republic, and its colonies in the West, Jews became a separate, but integral part of society even before they were granted civil rights (1796). Over the course of the nineteenth century (Bart T. Wallet), the Jewish minority, now officially a religious denomination, was nationalized and integrated further into general society, mainly due to education and the replacement of Yiddish by Dutch. As in preceding centuries, the poor were the last to profit from increasing opportunities for upward social mobility. The tide turned only slowly after 1870 (Hans Blom and Joël J. Cahen) when more Jews in the Kingdom of the Netherlands started to climb the social ladder. Meanwhile, community ties weakened, and “internal differentiation” made it increasingly harder to speak of “*the Jewish community, or the Jews*” (253). The period of the German occupation (1940–1945), a clear, radical breach in time, forms a separate chapter in the book (P. Romijn), which gives ample attention to the “Dutch paradox” – despite far-reaching integration and the reputation of the Netherlands as a tolerant country, the number of Jews living in the Netherlands killed in the Shoah was much higher than that of any other country in Western Europe. The post-war period (Bart T. Wallet) was characterized, on the one hand, by the impact of the war, and on the other, by continuing processes of individualization, globalization and reidentification, resulting in a variety of religious and cultural Dutch Jewish identities.

Reappraising the History of the Jews in the Netherlands is a substantially balanced and nuanced book. It carefully places the history of Dutch Jewry in a general Dutch and international Jewish context, demonstrating that Jewish identity, and belonging, are never fixed, but fluid, constantly evolving. Everyone interested in or studying Dutch Jewish history should consider this book a starting point.

Sietske van der Veen
University of Amsterdam

✉ sb.vanderveen@gmail.com, s.b.vanderveen2@uva.nl

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