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Belgian independence, orangism, and Jewish identity: the Jewish communities in Belgium during the Belgian revolution (1830-39)

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Publication date

2011

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Borders and boundaries in and around Dutch Jewish history

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Wallet, B. (2011). Belgian independence, orangism, and Jewish identity: the Jewish communities in Belgium during the Belgian revolution (1830-39). In J. Frishman, D. J. Wertheim, I. Haan, I. de Haan, & J. Cahen (Eds.), *Borders and boundaries in and around Dutch Jewish history* (pp. 167-181). Aksant.

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BART WALLEY

Belgian Independence, Orangism, and Jewish Identity

*The Jewish Communities in Belgium during the Belgian
Revolution (1830-39)*

The nineteenth century was a period in which nation states with considerable success created strict borders for their countries, thus separating people in border regions who had thus far lived together, speaking the same dialect and often adhering to the same type of religion. National languages were to replace regional dialects, and material signs such as customs offices stressed the borders.

This was supported by the rise of nationalism. Intellectuals and politicians constructed national identities in order to strengthen the inner cohesion of the state they envisaged, while at the same time drawing clear borders with those who were considered not to be part of the nation. Nationalism strived for a unified nation, with a minimum of internal borders, which meant for Jews that they had either to integrate into the nation or were considered foreigners who had no real attachment to the national space. As a consequence, the external borders were made particularly strong – which resulted in suspicion of subgroups in society with important transnational networks, such as Jews and Catholics. Against this background, borders might be defined as attempts to define and fix what belongs or does not belong in a given space.

Nineteenth-century nationalism challenged Jews in particular, since they were expected to show loyalty and patriotism after acquiring emancipation or in the process of acquiring it. Jews in border regions that changed from one nation to another due to wars were especially confronted with these themes. In this context, they had a variety of options, maybe even more than others. They could choose to remain loyal to the former nation or to take sides with the new authorities. But they also had a third possibility, namely to supersede both national positions by articulating a Jewish national identity. In this article, I concentrate on one such case, namely the attitude of the Jews towards the formation of the Belgian nation state after it split off from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was the first territorial change in Europe after the Congress of Vienna, which makes it an interesting case for analyzing what factors determined in this early stage of the nineteenth century the positions Jews chose in reaction to politically motivated spatial changes.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE DUTCH PERIOD (1815-30)

The so-called Dutch period in Belgian history, when the Southern Netherlands were part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-30), was of great importance to the development of the Jewish communities. Although the first Jews had already entered the territory in the Austrian period and Jews acquired civil rights during the French annexation, their numbers remained limited to a few hundred. Only after 1815 did the community start to grow rapidly, and the number of kehillot rose significantly.¹ On the eve of the Belgian Revolution, in 1830, there already lived between 3,000 and 3,500 Jews in the territory that became Belgium. They were concentrated in the cities, with most of them – between 700 and 800 – living in Brussels. Other communities had been founded in Antwerp, Gent, Mons, and Liège. One-third of the Jews in Belgian territory were concentrated in the province of Limburg, which had almost entirely joined the Revolution while its capital, Maastricht, stayed in Dutch possession.²

Each of the communities had its own social profile. In general they were composed of three groups: French, German, and Dutch Jews. The smallest group was the French Jews, who had entered the territory during the Napoleonic Era, but many of them had left with their compatriots in 1815.³ The German Jews were very prominent, because they formed the middle class and upper strata of the communities and were therefore overrepresented in the leadership of the kehillot. The largest group was the much poorer Dutch Jews, mostly immigrants from Amsterdam. As a result of Napoleon's Continental System, the economic circumstances had deteriorated, which also affected the large Jewish population in the city. A process of intranational migration took place; many left the city for the countryside, while others went to the southern Netherlands.

In the years 1803-8, under French rule, 30% of Jewish migrants in Brussels came from Germany, while 32% already originated from Holland. In 1817, after the foundation of the United Kingdom, no less than 53% was Dutch and only 16% German.⁴ In Brussels, there was a fragile balance of power between the German and Dutch Jews. In the board of parnassim, both groups were represented. The most prominent German Jew was Adolphe Oppenheim, a banker originating from

Frankfurt am Main.⁵ His foremost Dutch colleague was Alexandre van Lier, who left Maarssen, near Utrecht, for Brussels soon after the reunion of North and South. The difference in regional backgrounds was strengthened by different positions towards modernity. The German Jews, mostly originating from cities in southern Germany, were more open towards modern culture and wanted to adopt social and ritual innovations that were characteristic for German Jewry. The Dutch Jews, on the whole, were of a more conservative strand. This resulted in frequent clashes between the two groups.⁶

In other cities, the Dutch Jews were clearly in the majority. In Gent, immigrants from the no less conservative Alsace joined them, while in Antwerp, Dutch Jews dominated overall.⁷ In Liège, most Jews had their roots in nearby Maastricht and were deeply connected with their coreligionists there and in the German border region.⁸ In 1816, the southern provinces were integrated in the national organizational structure of Dutch Jewry.⁹ Two districts were created, headed by Supreme Synagogues in Brussels and Maastricht, and subjected to the Hoofcommissie tot de zaken der Israëlieten (Executive Committee for Israelite Affairs) based in The Hague. Maastricht was authorized to supervise the Limburg communities, Liège and Luxembourg, while Brussels had to maintain order in Mons, Antwerp, and Gent. In each district there was a so-called Corresponding Member to the Hague Committee, who delivered information and enjoyed widespread authority in his own district. The two southern districts had to cooperate closely, because they had to share a chief rabbi. Unfortunately, they were not very lucky, because their first chief rabbi Bezael Levi Glogauer had already left after one year and was not succeeded.¹⁰

In its contacts with The Hague, but also in the local societies, the southern Jews proved themselves very loyal to the United Kingdom and to the Royal House of Orange. In a letter, the Gent community wrote about "His Majesty our most honored King", while the Brussels community described itself as "les sujets ou plutôt les enfants du Prince" and completely committed to "notre auguste Monarque".¹¹ For the

5. Jean-Philippe Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique des Juifs de Belgique: Figures du judaïsme belge XIXe-XXe siècles* (Brussels: De Boeck université, 2002), 263-64.

6. Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 439.

7. 100, 1893-1993 *Hoofdsynagoge Bouwmeestersstraat Antwerpen* (Antwerp n.d.), 10.

8. Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 127, 428, 434; Schreiber, *L'immigration*, 150-51.

9. Cf. S. Ullmann, "Les Juifs en Belgique sous le régime hollandais", in *Histoire des Juifs en Belgique 1700-1830* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1934), 50-58.

10. Bart Walllet, *Nieuwe Nederlanders: De integratie van de joden in Nederland (1814-1851)* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007), 131-33. On Glogauer, see J.M. Lemmens, *Joods leven in Maastricht: Geschiedenis van de joodse gemeente sedert 1250, opgetekend bij gelegenheid van het 150-jarig bestaan van de synagoge in Maastricht (1840-1990)* (Maastricht: Stichting Historische Reeks Maastricht, 1990), 51-54.

11. Both quotations from Schreiber, *L'immigration juive*, 74.

1. Willy Bok, "Aperçu de l'évolution de la population juive au dix-neuvième siècle", in *La Grande Synagogue de Bruxelles, contributions à l'histoire des Juifs de Bruxelles 1878-1978* (Malmes: Communauté Israélite de Bruxelles, Van den Bossche, 1978), 105.

2. Numbers based on Jean-Philippe Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique du moyen âge à la première guerre mondiale* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1996), 71.

3. [Hartog Somerhausen], "Briefe aus Belgien: III", *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 1, no. 14 (1852): 541.

4. Cill Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues: Migration und ihre Folgen: Deutsche Juden als Pioniere jüdischen Lebens in Belgien, 18./19. Jahrhundert* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 111, 116, 121.

Dutch Jewish group within the communities, this patriotism could link up with a long tradition of identification with the Dutch and the Oranges, but the German Jews appeared to identify themselves with the state as well. From the 1820s onward, a process of naturalization took place in which a rising number of German Jews sought to acquire Dutch citizenship. Adolphe Oppenheim, the German Jewish leader in Brussels, was also naturalized in 1829. Becoming a Dutch citizen was both a positive choice for the United Kingdom and at the same time a negative one towards the German state that the migrant had left.¹²

THE BELGIAN REVOLUTION

It is important to stress that the Belgian Revolution of 1830 was not so much a nationalistic revolution of a Belgian nation against Dutch domination, but rather a liberal revolution against the autocratic rule of King William I. The revolutionaries wanted more democracy, a stronger parliament, and less power invested solely in the King. Southern citizens were underrepresented in parliament and in prominent positions. The suppression of Catholic education led to a very broadly based alliance between liberals and Catholics directed against the King. In the first instance, this was just to achieve more civic liberties and a better position for southern citizens, but in the course of the Belgian Revolution, and due to the hesitant reaction of William I, it aimed more and more to achieve independence not only from the King but from the North as well.¹³

The Belgian Revolution, which started on William's birthday, 25 August 1830, created from the outset two important borders in the Jewish communities of the United Kingdom. The first is the geographical border between the Jews in the North and the Jews in the South. The second is a political border within the southern communities, between proponents of the Revolution and the Orangists, who remained loyal to the King.

For the Jews in the northern part of the Kingdom, the Belgian Revolution provided an excellent occasion to show that their patriotism was no less than that of other citizens. Many Jews decided to volunteer for the army and participated in the 1831 Ten Days' campaign. In the citadel of Antwerp, which remained in Dutch hands until 1834, there was even a synagogue erected for the Jewish soldiers. Its commander, Baron Chassé, later wrote in a very favorable way about the bravery of his Jewish men.

Dutch Jews also declared their love for the country and contempt for the Bel-

Carel Asser, lithograph.
From: *Jaarboeken voor de
Israëlieten*, 1837 (775jaar k).

gian revolutionaries via the media. The prominent lawyer Samuel Philippus Lipman wrote no fewer than eight leaflets in which he praised the King, despised the Belgians, and honored Dutch heroes such as commander Jan van Speijk, who blew up his ship together with its Belgian assailants.¹⁴ The intellectual Mozes Lemans, an Amsterdam Maskil, rhymed a Hebrew historical poem titled *Pesha Belgi* – the Sin of Belgium. It was headed by a significant citation from the book of Jeremiah 20:9: “In my heart is a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”¹⁵ The teacher of the Jewish school in Groningen, Isaac Joadja Cohen, also composed a Hebrew rhyme on the Ten Days' campaign, which was published together with a Dutch translation.¹⁶

14. Lipman was in favor of the separation because he saw an inseparable rift between the “beloved Holland” and the “feared Belgium”; an analysis of his leaflets is provided by A. Smits, *1830 scheuring in de Nederlanden, deel III: Hoofdstukspellers, medespelers en bespelers van de publieke opinie in de Nederlanden* (Kortrijk-Heule: UGA, 1999), 161–70.

15. For an introduction and edition of this poem, see Jozeph Michman, “Pesha Belgie-Moshe Lemans” [Hebrew], in *Michmanei Yosef: Studies on the History and Literature of Dutch Jewry* (Jerusalem: Institute for Research on Dutch Jews, 1994), 483–526.

16. Isaac Joadja Cohen, *Uitboezeming eens Hebreërs na den tiendaagschen roemrijken veldtocht*, translated from Hebrew into Dutch by S.J. van Ronkel (Amsterdam: D. Proops Jacobszoon, 1831). For the

12. Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 345–49.

13. Some good introductions to the history of the Belgian Revolution are: Rolf Falter, 1830: *De schietding van Nederland, België en Luxemburg* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2005); Peter Rietbergen, *Broedertwist: Belgie en Nederland en de erfenis van 1830* (3:1 Horigenboech/Leuven/Zwolle: Waanders, 2005); Roland Van Orlowenke, ed., *België: De scheuring van een staat* (Roosdaal: Globe, 2005).

While the Jews in the North unanimously sided with the King, the Jewish communities in the South were deeply divided. Among them we can discern three positions. Each position I will illustrate with the story of a prominent personality. The first position is that of the Belgicists, those in the community who sided with the revolutionaries. It is no surprise that they are mostly to be found among the German Jews, who were in the same social segment of society as the liberal revolutionaries and had no historically rooted attachment to the House of Orange. These Belgicist Jews hoped that the revolution would open even more opportunities for them and create a more equal society. They participated in the revolution, thus fighting on the other side as their coreligionists from the North. Joseph Oppenheim, the younger brother of Adolphe, is a good example of this position. At the age of twenty, he joined the revolutionaries and fought under General Van Delft in the battle of Pellenberg. He was honored for his participation in the revolution by the inscription of his name in the Brussels monument for the independence fighters.¹⁷ The Brussels community was proud of the Jewish soldiers, as a letter to the new minister of interior affairs made clear: "De nombreuses promotions aux grades d'officiers prouvent en même temps le dévouement de nos jeunes coreligionnaires à la cause sacrée de la liberté et que la patrie dans les témoignages de sa reconnaissance ne fait pas de distinction entre ses enfants."¹⁸

Jews with their origins in the northern provinces of the United Kingdom, however, overwhelmingly sided with the Orangists. They remained loyal to the King, which was more difficult in a city like Brussels than in more Orangist cities such as Gent and Antwerp. One of them, Carel Asser, a very prominent Jew working in the government, a member of the Hoofdcammissie living alternately in The Hague and Brussels, wrote a letter to the King on 6 September 1830 expressing "my love for our country and attachment to Your Majesty's Hereditary House". He advised the King to send his son William to Orangist Gent in order to create a counterweight to the developments in Brussels.¹⁹ When the Belgian Revolution proved to be successful, many Dutch Jews chose to leave the country and returned to the North. One of them was Alexandre van Lier, who had been a parnas in Brussels for many years and had acquired a significant position both in society and in the community.

The third position can best be described as neutrality. Both German and Dutch Jews who had been satisfied with their positions during the Dutch period and tried not to become part of the conflicts took this position. When they found out that a

separate Belgian state had come into being and there was enough international support to keep it independent, they accepted the new situation and cooperated *con amore* in the development of the new state. Their dependence on the local economy or their position in local society made them prefer to wait first and adapt thereafter to the new political reality. One of the most significant Brussels Jews is a good example of this position: Hartog or Hirsch Somerhausen. The intellectual Somerhausen was originally a German Jew but was living in Amsterdam when in 1817 he was invited by the Brussels community to set up a Jewish school. He left Amsterdam, where he had been a member of the Maskilic association Tongelet and settled in Brussels. The school he founded was distinguished as a "model school" by the Dutch government because of its modern methods and stress on the Dutch language.²⁰ He also became the Corresponding Member of the Executive Committee and thus was the link between The Hague and Brussels. After the Belgian Revolution he stayed in Brussels, accepted the new situation, and was active in the reconstruction of Jewish life in Belgium.²¹

THE INTERNAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE BELGIAN REVOLUTION

The positions taken towards the Belgian Revolution were chosen very much along ethnic lines. The divide between German and Dutch Jews, differing in religious and cultural affairs, was politicized. The Belgian Revolution thus had large consequences – internal, organizational and ideological – for the Jewish communities in the country. I will discuss these consequences one by one.

First, many Dutch Jews left, which strengthened the relative influence of the German Jews. The provincial authorities of Brabant were of the opinion that out of 600 Jews in Brussels in 1830 at least 200 had left.²² In Gent as well, one-third of the community returned to the north: before the Revolution there were 155 Jews in the city; in 1832 they numbered fewer than 100.²³ In Antwerp, where the Dutch Jews formed the vast majority, many left, including one of the two community leaders. With the state of research at this moment, we could say that roughly one-third of the Jewish population showed its Orangist sympathies by leaving the country. Their places were soon filled with new immigrants arriving from France and Germany.²⁴

stance of Dutch Jewry towards the Belgian Revolution, see also the diaries of Netje and Eduard Asser in I.H. van Eeghen, ed., *Uit Amsterdamse dagboeken: De jeugd van Netje en Eduard Asser 1810-1833* (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1964), 211-21.

17. Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 264-65; Kasper-Holtkotte, *In Westen Neues*, 350.

18. Quoted in Schreiber, *L'immigration*, 115; on Jews in the Belgian army, see *Sulamith* 8, no. 2 (1841): 323-26.

19. C. Gerretson, *Muiterij en scheuring, 1810*, vol. 2 (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1936), 283.

20. [Somerhausen], "Briefe aus Belgien: III", 550-51.

21. Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 319-20.

22. Schreiber, *L'immigration*, 115-16.

23. *Ibid.*, 155-56.

24. Bok, "Aperçu de l'évolution", 111. Unfortunately there are thus far no data available on the number of people who left for the North; see Robert André and José Pereira-Roque, *La démographie de la Belgique au XIX^e siècle* (Brussels: Université de Bruxelles, 1974), which provides only numbers from the 1840s onwards.

Second, the balance of power shifted entirely towards the German Jews who had made the right political choice. In all cities right after the Declaration of Independence, new boards replaced the old ones that had been installed by the Dutch governments. In Brussels, Adolphe Oppenheim was chosen as the chairman of the provisional board, while the other members were almost all of German-Jewish origins as well.²⁵ The ideological background of this new board was made evident in a letter to the new minister of interior affairs, in which it expressed its enthusiasm for the new Constitution, which is "si libérale que le peuple belge s'est donné et pour laquelle aussi nos jeunes israélites ont versé leur sang dans les glorieuses et mémorables journées de septembre."²⁶

In Antwerp the old board was replaced as well, but the new one, in which the German-Jewish banker Jonathan-Raphael Bischoffsheim prominently figured, had great difficulties in imposing its will on the community.²⁷ While one of the old leaders left for the Netherlands, the other one, Mozes Kreyn, stayed but was not willing to hand over the ceremonial objects of the kehillah. Until that time, the community had rented a building from Kreyn to use as a synagogue, an arrangement that came to an end as well. Finally, Bischoffsheim had to pay all the expenses for the community and services himself, since in the chaos there was no possibility to collect any money from the members.²⁸

Third, chaos is a good description of the situation just after the Revolution, not only in Antwerp but also elsewhere. The teachers of the Jewish schools in Brussels and Antwerp nearly all left for the Netherlands. As a consequence, the lessons had to be suspended. Only in 1832 did the Brussels school start anew, with its founder Hartog Somerhausen as its president.²⁹ Due to the revolution, chazzan Hirschfeld of the Brussels community also left. As a German Jew, he did not go to Holland but accepted a call from Jamaica to serve there as a chazzan.³⁰ Even as late as 1833, the assessment of the situation in Gent was nothing less than: "l'anarchie règne parmi nos co-religionnaires."³¹

Fourth, an important consequence of the changing political situation both outside and inside the community was that the position of the Dutch language

among Belgian Jews deteriorated. The Dutch government had advocated the Dutch language and wanted the Jewish communities to conduct their meetings and minutes all in Dutch. The large group of Dutch Jews also continued to use their language. Even before the Revolution, most German Jews adopted French as their daily language, a process that was only strengthened by the new political situation. The new government used French, and the Jewish communities followed its example. The provisory board of the Brussels community used French from its onset, while the Jewish school – once a Dutch-language model school – also gradually changed into a French school.³² Somerhausen greatly regretted this French orientation in community and society. He was among the fierce proponents of the Dutch language and was befriended with Jan Frans Willems, one of the founders of the Flemish movement. Somerhausen also contributed to a number of Flemish journals in Brussels, Antwerp, and Gent.³³ In Brussels he could not succeed, nonetheless, in keeping Dutch equally important in the Jewish community as French.³⁴

THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONSEQUENCES

The political independence from the northern part of the former United Kingdom, the migration towards the north, and the chaos in the communities necessitated a reconstruction of the Jewish communities in Belgium. One of the first things that happened right after the Declaration of Independence was a meeting of the thirty most prominent southern Jews, who suspended all contacts with the Executive Committee in The Hague and decided to found their own national organizational structure. Right after this meeting, they visited Somerhausen, until then the representative of The Hague, to inform him that the communities had ended their relations with the North.³⁵ On 1 November 1832, the new Consistoire Central Israélite de Belgique officially came into being. In its name, it deliberately hinted at the French sister organization, thus distancing itself strongly from the Dutch organization it had separated from. Nevertheless, in its structure both French and Dutch influences are to be detected. Its first president was again the well-known Belgicist Adolphe Oppenheim.³⁶

25. Kasper-Holkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 440.

26. Quoted in Schreiber, *L'immigration*, 115.

27. Ephraïm Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de joden in Antwerpen in woord en beeld, aangevuld herdruk van de Nederlandse uitgave* (Antwerp and Rotterdam: C. de Vries-Brouwers, 1994), 93, 96.

28. Schreiber, *L'immigration*, 132-33; idem, *Politique et religion: Le Consistoire Central Israélite de Belgique au XIXe siècle* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1995), 80-81.

29. [Hartog Somerhausen], "Briefe aus Brüssel. V", *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 2, no. 7 (1853): 274; Willy Bok, "L'école primaire israélite à Bruxelles 1817 à 1879", in *La Grande Synagogue*, 125-40.

30. [Somerhausen], "Briefe aus Belgien. III", 549-50.

31. Carmoly on 14 October 1833, quoted in Kasper-Holkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 427; cf. Schreiber, *Politique et religion*, 91.

32. Bok, "L'école primaire", 125-40.

33. Jean Bloch, "Inleiding", in *150 jaar jodendom in België* (Brussels: Centraal Israëlitisch Consistorie van België, 1980), 7; idem, "Quelques personnalités juives dans la vie publique et dans la vie intellectuelle à Bruxelles au dix-neuvième siècle", in *La Grande Synagogue*, 34-35.

34. Kasper-Holkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 460. A good indication for the decline of Dutch in the Brussels community is provided by the inscriptions on the *matsevoit*: Philippe Pierret, *Mémoires, mentalités, religieuses, art funéraire: la partie juive du cimetière du Dieweg à Bruxelles, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris and Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 119-38.

35. [Somerhausen], "Briefe aus Brüssel. V", 270.

36. W. Bok, "Het Belgische Jodendom: Heden en verleden", in *Centraal Israëlitisch Consistorie*, 12; Schreiber, *Politique et religion*, 10-12.

Since the Belgian state was the first to radically separate church and state, thus effectuating the liberal objective of the Revolution, a completely new situation arose. The organizational structure was no longer subjected to the government, but completely free. The communities themselves were free to elect their representatives. The liberal constitution also made it possible for Jews to receive the same amount of funding from the government as that of the dominant Catholic Church received. During the United Kingdom, the Jewish community got considerably less financial support than the other denominations. In the first budget of the Belgian state, in 1830, the Jewish community was however not mentioned at all. Therefore a group of prominent Belgian Jews, including Adolphe Oppenheim and Hartog Somershausen, asked the National Congress to place rabbis on the payroll of the State, just as priests and ministers were. In their address, full of Belgian nationalistic language, they expressed their gratitude towards the lawmakers "qui n'ont vu que des frères dans le peuple belge!" With reference to the principle of "égalité des cultes" they stated: "Vous avez proclamé que les avantages sont égaux, et nous sommes citoyens belges." The action was successful, and the rabbis and Jewish education were given the same amount of money as their Catholic and Protestant counterparts.³⁷

In the address, the Belgian Jews also made mention of the lack of a chief rabbi of their own. They urged the Congress to subsidize such a position as well, because otherwise the Belgian Jews would remain spiritually dependent on a Dutch chief rabbi, something that must have been a horrible thought for the MPs of the young Belgian state.³⁸ Soon after the positive answer of the Congress, a new chief rabbi was welcomed in Brussels. The young French scholar Eliakim Carmoly was invited to become the first chief rabbi and inaugurated on 26 May 1832. After his introductory sermon, a couple of toasts were made to the new Belgian King Leopold, both chambers of parliament, the prosperity of Belgium under its liberal constitution, political and religious tolerance, and to the emancipation of Jews in other countries which will enable them to enjoy the same rights and prospects as the Belgian Jews under the paternal scepter of Leopold.³⁹

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

The toasts at the reception in honor of Carmoly hint at the third set of consequences of the Revolution for Belgian Jewry. The Belgian Revolution was a liberal revolution, not a nationalistic one. Before 1830 there hardly existed such a thing as a col-

Mozes Lemans. From: archive Joods Historisch Museum.

lective Belgian identity. It needed to be constructed when in the course of events Belgium appeared to become an independent state, not a part of the Netherlands or France.⁴⁰ This is all the more true for Belgian Jewry, of whom the vast majority were born outside the country and many of whom, especially the German Jews, were still not naturalized at all.

A liberal variant of nationalism became important in providing the new state with a sense of collective identity, which was in first instance predominantly directed at creating clear borders with the North. Therefore all Belgian politicians had to swear an oath to renounce the House of Orange. Jewish politicians, such as Marcus Deby who became the burgomaster of Laeken in 1834, took this oath as well.⁴¹

37. E. Carmoly, "Essai sur l'histoire des Juifs en Belgique (suite)", *Revue Orientale* 1 (1841): 319.

38. Ibid., 320. Cf. "Nachrichten aus der Synagoge", *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* 1 (1835): 136.

39. Carmoly, "Essai sur l'histoire des Juifs en Belgique (suite)", 421-22, based on *Le Moniteur belge*, no. 152 (1832).

40. Cf. Lode Wils, "The Two Belgian Revolutions", and, as a nice example, Lut Pil, "Painting at the Service of the New Nation State", in *Nationalism in Belgium: Shifting Identities, 1780-1995*, ed. Kas Deprez and Louis Vos (Houndsmills, Basingstoke/London/New York: St. Martins Press, 1998), resp. 33-41, 42-50.

41. On Marcus or Marc Julien Deby, see Schreiber, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 87. Cf. "Belgien", *Der Orient* 1, no. 27 (1840): 206.

Not only did the Belgian state try to construct a national identity, Belgian Jewry did the same. The new chief rabbi, Carmoly, and Hartog Somerhausen were important architects of this new Belgian Jewish identity. It was composed of a Belgian and a Jewish component, which together provided a specific ideological profile for the communities. The Belgian component consisted of elements of dedication and loyalty to the new King and State in the liturgy at synagogue and in educational material for Jewish schools. Belgium was considered to be the best state for Jews to live in, since it was the most liberal one, guaranteeing equality to all its subjects.⁴²

Carmoly described the Belgian nation as "one big family" in which the Jews were recently adopted. He endorsed the liberal conviction that religion had to be a private affair, while the public space was neutral and impartial. But he even went further. He wanted Belgian Jews to acculturate to general moral convictions: "Trevallons à mettre nos intérêts et nos mœurs en harmonie avec les mœurs et les intérêts de tous. Qu'une coopération franche et efficace témoigne notre gratitude envers cette civilisation dont le premier bienfait pour nous, a été notre émancipation!"⁴³

But there was also a Jewish component in the new Belgian-Jewish identity. Somerhausen and Carmoly found each other in their dedication to a new religious profile for the communities in Belgium. During his Amsterdam years, Somerhausen was an active member of the circle of local Maskilim and thus in contact with people like Samuel Israel Mulder, Mozes Lemans, and Gabriel Polak. These people promoted a civilized form of Orthodox Judaism, with more attention for decorum, the vernacular, and sermons. In the Netherlands, however, this civilizing program was only gradually introduced, because the Supreme Committee wanted to keep the whole Dutch Jewish community together. Once Belgium became independent from the Netherlands, Somerhausen and Carmoly saw their chance to introduce a number of innovations at once.⁴⁴ It is a nice irony of history that precisely the Amsterdam Haskalah provided the ideology for the new Belgian Jewish identity.

Implementation was not all that easy. Changes in ritual and liturgy are always with very sensitive issues in religious communities. The architects of the innovations met with considerable opposition from within the communities, especially from the Dutch Jews who had stayed in Belgium and still took the most conservative stance within Belgian Jewry.⁴⁵ One of the former Dutch Jewish leaders of the community, Jacob Abas, who lost his position after the regime change, was contin-

uously trying to undermine the attempts of the new leadership to introduce innovations.⁴⁶ The communities of Gent and Antwerp did not want to introduce the new order for the synagogue service either and kept following the *minhag* Amsterdam, much to the dismay of Brussels.⁴⁷

Carmoly met such strong opposition that he barely executed his chief rabbinic tasks from 1835 until his resignation in 1839. Somerhausen, however, stayed in Brussels and even was elected a member of the consistory in 1846. Thanks to his and Carmoly's efforts, Belgian Jewry's image was more progressive than that of its northern neighbors, without introducing such far-going innovations as Reform Judaism had in Germany and England.⁴⁸

THE LIMBURG CASE

The Belgian nation, and Belgian Jewry as well, was built up in the years after 1830. But the entire time one problem remained: King William I did not accept the existence of an independent Belgian state and was not willing to sign any agreement with the new neighbor. The consequences of William's inflexible attitude were most sharply felt in the province of Limburg. Almost all of the province had taken sides with the Belgian revolutionaries and had become a part of the new state. Only the city of Maastricht stayed in Dutch hands, thus forming a besieged enclave in Belgian territory.

The Jewish community in Maastricht, consisting of nearly 300 persons, was most loyal to the Dutch regime. The commander of Maastricht, General Dibbets, entrusted the Ministry of War "that the Jews in general, here and in the surroundings, have been of great help to me, and, as they say, feel very strongly about the rightful case of Holland."⁴⁹ Since the beginning of the Belgian Revolution, thirty-five to sixty soldiers were in the city continuously to defend it. The Maastricht kehillah did its best to provide them all with matzos during Pesach and even organized separate services during Yom Kippur and Sukkot 1835 for the Jewish military.⁵⁰

Maastricht was still in contact with The Hague, which continued to reappoint the parrassim time and time again in order not to change a thing during the siege. The kehillot that once were part of the Maastricht district, such as Sittard, Eijsden, and Meerssen, were no longer in contact with either Maastricht or The Hague.⁵¹ These Limburg kehillot were integrated in the new Belgian consistorial structure and be-

42. "Belgien", *Der Orient* 2, no. 6 (1841): 42; Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 410; Schreiber, *Politique et religion*, 21.

43. "Essai sur l'histoire des Juifs en Belgique (suite)", 423.

44. Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues* p. 457-58; see an extensive discussion of Carmoly's and Somerhausen's reform policy in Jean-Philippe Schreiber, "La doctrine du Consistoire: Le libéralisme religieux", in idem, *Politique et religion*, 127-49.

45. Marc Kahlenberg, "La modification statutaire dans la synagogue de Bruxelles, de 1830 à 1880", in idem, *La synagogue de Bruxelles, 1830-1880*, 10-14.

46. Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 417-18.

47. [Somerhausen], "Briefe aus Brüssel. V", 277.

48. Ibid., 272-73.

49. Quoted in Lemmens, *Joods leven in Maastricht*, 35.

50. Jac Lemmens, *Via assimiliatie naar emancipatie: De joodse gemeente Maastricht ten tijde van de Commissie tot Zaken der Israëlieten, 1817-1870* [MA thesis, Catholic University Nijmegen, 1988], 41-42.

51. Lemmens, *Via assimiliatie*, 48.

came subject to the *Liege kehillah*.⁵² They formed no less than one-third of Belgian Jewry and differed from the rest of the communities by their rural nature. They participated wholeheartedly in the new structures, which opened new opportunities for them such as governmental funding for several ritual and educational functions.⁵³

Finally, in 1839, King William I accepted in the Treaty of London the existence of the Belgian state and succeeded in getting back parts of Luxembourg and Limburg. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands was officially dissolved and renamed the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Thus the Belgian consistory lost a considerable number of its communities, while Maastricht once again became the supreme synagogue of the Limburg district.⁵⁴ An evaluation of the situation of Limburg Jewry in 1841 resulted in a total number of 1,020 Jews, with real synagogue buildings only in Gulpen and Maastricht and only a single Jewish school in Maastricht.⁵⁵ The chief rabbi of Nijmegen, Jacob Lehmann, was entrusted with the rebuilding of Jewish life in the province. In 1846, the first separate chief rabbi of Limburg, Leib Benjamin Schaap, succeeded him. Together with the Maastricht parnassim and Salomon Bloemendal, Corresponding Member of the Executive Committee, he succeeded in reviving the district and rooting it firmly in the national Dutch structures.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

In the second half of the nineteenth century, nationalism played an important role in disputed territories between nation states, such as the Alsace, Transylvania, and Silesia. The Belgian case is clearly a different one, in which a liberal ideology motivated the revolution against an autocratic king, with nationalism starting to play a role only in a second stage. The Jews of Belgium therefore joined the revolution primarily because they embraced the liberal agenda, and after independence was acquired, found themselves confronted with the task of constructing a separate Belgian Jewish identity. On the one hand, this new identity was congruent with the construction of the national Belgian identity, while on the other hand, the Amsterdam Haskalah provided an important religious agenda to push forward. A separate Jewish identity, apart from either the Dutch or the Belgian identity, was out of the question. In this era there was still much enthusiasm about the emancipation project, and a Jewish nationalism was therefore not yet a realistic option, as it would become in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The creation of a geographical border between the North and South laid open the social and ideological border between German and Dutch Jews in the communities in the South. The fight inside the community was at least as heated as the fights between the Dutch and Belgian armies, although luckily in this fight no casualties were to be mourned. After the new ideological border was erected via the construction of a Belgian Jewish identity, it appeared that the Netherlands were still close by. In 1840, migration from the North had already restarted, this time over a real and an ideological border. The migrating Dutch Jews continued to be aware of that and remained loyal to the Dutch state by not naturalizing to the Belgian nationality until 1881, when a new Belgian law on naturalization was issued.⁵⁷ Since 1830, Belgian Jewry and Dutch Jewry had become two different communities, with a clear yet surmountable border in between.

52. J.M. Lemmens, "De Sittardse joden en hun begraafplaatsen", in *Sittard, uit bronnen geput*, ed. P.L. Neve et al. (Sittard: Sig, Historie Sittard, 1993), 526.

53. Schreiber, *L'immigration*, 168-69; idem, *Politique et religion*, 98-99.

54. Lemmens, *Joods leven in Maastricht*, 35-36.

55. Lemmens, *Via assimilatie*, 60.

56. Lemmens, *Joods leven in Maastricht*, 38-39, 54-56.

57. Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues*, 351-56.