Summary

Jews settled in Overijssel as long ago as the first half of the 14th century. In 1349, however, these early Jewish settlers were persecuted, then banished, as they were thought responsible for the Black Death, which then broke out. During the 17th century Jews again settled in Overijssel, but their presence was only tolerated, on the understanding that they would not proselytize the Gentile population.

During the 18th century Jews fulfilled an important economic role in the rural areas of Overijssel. Jewish peddlars travelled throughout the farming areas of the Province and, in doing so, established contact between the Jewish and non-Jewish population. Not only did these Jews have family ties in the Germanic lands, but they also had business contacts there.

Before 1795, the organization structure of Jews in the Republic ran along parallel lines to that of the non-Jewish population of the region. Central government played no significant role in local policy; the councils of the major cities plus the nobility decided policy, and were practically autonomous. Within the Jewish congregations a similar situation prevailed. These congregations had always been governed by the leading figures in their midst. The Parnassim - administrators - had an extremely powerful position within the community because of the authority vested in them by the office they held. Among other things, the Parnassim controlled the provision of meat, services to the poor, and the use of the ritual bath. They were authorized to impose fines, and even excommumicate members. This power was sanctioned by the civil authorities, who also tried to settle conflicts within the ‘Kehillah’ or organized Jewish community. The councils of the major cities plus the nobility decided what rights Jews would be granted.

In 1796 the Decree of Emancipation granted Jews equal civil rights. Debates on the equality of Jews took place in the National Assembly. The representatives of Overijssel: J.A. Uytenhage de Mist, the town clerk of Kampen; J. Kantelaar, a clergyman in Kampen; J.B. Auffmorth, burgomaster of Goor; J.H. Floh, a clergyman in Hengelo; J.A. De Vos van Steenwijck from Vollenhove and H.J. Colmschate from Almelo, all played a marked role in these debates. Equality brought an end to the autonomy of the Kehillot, the Jewish congregations. Among other things, this resulted in the Dutch government taking responsibility for the appointment of Chief Rabbis.
Rabbis and Chief Rabbis have been active in Overijssel since the 18th century, and many of them originally came from Germany or Poland. The Chief Rabbis held office in Zwolle. After the Chief Consistory had been established in 1808, the rabbi of Zwolle acted as Chief Rabbi of the area. The local rabbis continued their work in Overijssel, such as Rabbi Oppenheimer in Almelo, and Rabbi Kruksiener in Oldenzaal. In 1808, Fartog Joshua Hertzveld was appointed Chief Rabbi of the main synagogue in Zwolle, which included the regions of Overijssel, Drenthe and a part of Gelderland.

Hertzveld steadfastly upheld the emancipation policy of the Dutch government. By implementing the language policy and maintaining decorum in the synagogue the government hoped to bring about the integration of Jews in Dutch society. Hertzveld's proposal to change the worship met with great opposition from orthodox Jews, with the Lehren brothers as the leading opponents, and his proposal to introduce confirmation for Jewish children was also met with fierce resistance. He was accused of being indoctrinated by the ideology of the Reform Movement in Germany. The orthodox community also torpedoed Hertzveld's proposal to convene a rabbinical convention.

When Hertzveld died in 1846, the chief rabbinate of Overijssel remained vacant till the appointment of Jacob Fränkel in 1852, which the 'Lehren' group had tried to thwart by every ethical and unethical means. Fränkel, as Hertzveld before him, was suspected of supporting reform ideology. The consternation surrounding this appointment was, in fact, a battle being fought in Overijssel between liberalism and orthodoxy; this battle was won by the liberals. Fränkel's appointment led to a breakaway of conservative factions within the Jewish congregations, such as in Steenwijk, for instance. Chief Rabbi Fränkel continued to uphold the emancipation policy of his predecessor Hertzveld, not only as far as the introduction of the choral singing was concerned, but also by supervising Jewish communities regarding decorum in the synagogue, implementing the language policy of the Dutch government, and abolishing the strict conventions surrounding religious education. Although Fränkel was an advocate of the language policy to ban Yiddish, he personally never took the trouble to learn to speak or write Dutch. Fränkel died in 1882.

In spite of the decree passed in 1796 granting Jews equal civil rights with the rest of the population, it took another fifty years before emancipation filtered through into certain professions. Many Jews continued to work at their old professions in trade and industry. The rise of industry, however, gave Jews the opportunity of improving their professional status. Jews who were originally in the 'rag trade', like the Spanjaard family in Borne, eventually became textile manufacturers.

Another fifty years passed before Jews had any significant influence in urban government. Before 1850 only a small number of Jews were members of city councils, such as Salomon Israël Themans who, between 1831 and 1842, was alderman in Oldenzaal. After the first half of the 19th century, however, it was no longer an
exception for Jews to hold posts on local councils. In Almelo, members of the
Salomonson family of manufacturers were local councillors for seventy successive
years, and in Borne, being a member of the local council was almost a family affair
for the Spanjaards. The majority of Jewish councillors and aldermen came from
liberal circles or represented a local political party. A few were members of the
S.D.A.P (Social Democratic Labour Party). In the Second World War the Germans
demanded the resignation of every Jewish councillor and alderman.

The emancipation of Jews in Overijssel did not lead to extensive assimilation. Con-
version to Christianity remained a rare exception, as did expressions of anti-Semitic.
The civil government in Overijssel, the councils of the major cities plus the
nobility, was not, as a rule, guilty of introducing anti-Semitic legislation. Jews in
rural areas and small towns were usually allowed to conduct their business in peace.
The Jews in Kampen and Zwolle had to obey the rules laid down by the guilds, and
Deventer did not admit Jews for economic reasons. After 1796, this situation re-
mained virtually unchanged. It took decades before Jews held government posts as
mentioned earlier. Only in the second half of the 19th century did social emancipa-
tion of Jews occur, and this was the trend across the board, because, until then, Jews
had been a small, disadvantaged minority. The integration of Jews into Dutch soci-
ety was considered by some as a threat to the national character of the Netherlands
and led to both oral and written anti-Semitic statements. A well-known example is
Abraham Kuyper’s brochure on Liberalists and Jews.

Only in one place, Oldenzaal, were Jews in the Netherlands confronted by blatant
acts of anti-Semitism. Catholics from Oldenzaal, returning from a pilgrimage to
Kevelaer, assaulted Jews and smashed their windows. These ‘pogroms’ occurred
between 1892 and 1897. The immediate cause was the Buschoff affair in Xanten in
1892. Finally the burgomaster then in office, De Wael, took steps to suppress these
riots, which occurred each time pilgrims returned from their annual pilgrimage. The
anti-Semitism in Germany clearly had ramifications in Oldenzaal. The Freemasons
of Deventer were also affected by this German anti-Semitism.

Sephardic Jews, with their erudite and aristocratic background, had been admitted to
Freemasons’ lodges in Holland as early as the 18th century, although at that time
Jews were not admitted to other non-Jewish institutions such as learned or literary
societies and clubs either in Holland or elsewhere in the Netherlands. The three
lodges in the Province of Overijssel, namely, Le Profond Silence in Kampen, Fides
Mutua in Zwolle, and Le Préjugé Vaincu in Deventer, had no Jewish members
during the 18th century. In 1818, Salomon de Jong was the first Jew to become a
member of the Kampen lodge. It is surprising that, although Jews in Overijssel never
constituted more than 1.6% of the population, percentage-wise they were overrepre-
sented in the lodges. For instance, in the masonic year 1840-1841, more than 25% of
the members of the Freemasons’ lodge in Zwolle were of Jewish origin. In Deventer,
Le Préjugé lodge had a top year as far as Jewish membership was concerned in
1900-1901, when Dutch and German Jews made up approximately 25% of the total

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brotherhood. German Jews were integrated in Deventer after being refused membership in a number of German lodges. *Le Préjugé Vaincu* made an official protest against the anti-Semitic policy of these German lodges.

During the 20th century several masonic societies in Twente reorganised themselves in lodges, namely: *Fraternité* in Almelo, *De Troffel* in Hengelo, and *Tubantia* in Enschede. The *Fraternité* and *De Troffel* were small, with only a few Jewish members. However from its foundation in 1897 the *Tubantia* lodge had a high percentage of Jewish members which, on average, was 25%. This was all the more remarkable because Jewish membership had declined drastically in the lodges of Kampen and Zwolle after the turn of the century. The emancipation of Jews in Dutch society, completed with some success, together with a new reflection among the Jews upon their own identity, were the root causes of this. The appointment of the agudist Hirsch as Chief Rabbi of the district of Overijssel heralded the beginning of this period of reflection. However, in the ‘Nederlands Israelitische Gemeente’ (NIG: The Netherlands Jewish Congregation) of Enschede Hirsch had very little influence, and the young sons of manufacturers from the Spanjaard, Weijl, and Rozendaal families, for example, became members of lodges. Unlike the Jewish Freemasons of the 19th century, the Jewish Freemasons of the 20th century did not play a leading role in Jewish congregational life in Overijssel.

During the 19th century the administrators of the Netherlands Jewish Synagogues sometimes included Freemasons. In 1858, three of the five governors of the Zwolle synagogue were Freemasons: Joël Philipson, president and corresponding member of the Main Committee; Abraham Bramson, treasurer; and Leon van Enthoven, member. A similar situation prevailed in the NIGs of Kampen and Deventer, where Jews often occupied important masonic positions in lodges as well. Seligman Susan from Deventer was not only president of the NIG in Deventer, but also held the chair as master of *Le Préjugé Vaincu* lodge in Deventer.

The lodges expected all their members to have a certain level of erudition and/or affluence. The professions practised by some of the Jewish lodge members included professors, teachers, doctors, surgeons, lawyers, registrars, manufacturers, merchants, bandmasters, and butchers. For all these Jewish Freemasons the lodge functioned as a stepping stone into non-Jewish society.

In 1882, after the death of Jacob Fränkel, the Jewish community in Overijssel had to continue without a permanent Chief Rabbi. The *ad interim* Chief Rabbis were: Tobias Tal, 1882-1883; J.S. Hillesum 1883-1888; L. Wagenaar 1888-1898; M. Monasch 1898-1899; T. Lewenstein 1899-1900, and A. van Loen 1900-1902. It was not until 1902 that S.J.S. Hirsch was appointed as the permanent Chief Rabbi for the district of Overijssel.

The appointment of the orthodox Samuel Juda Simon Hirsch marked the beginning of a new era for the Jewish community in Overijssel. There was a definite U-turn in
the emancipation course set by Hertzveld and Fränkel. During the first decade of
Hirsch’s rabbinate three significant conflicts arose between the Chief Rabbi and the
NIGs of Zwolle, Enschede, and Almelo, which marked the beginning of an orthodox
trend. For instance, Hirsch wanted to place a barrier in front of the women’s gallery
in the synagogue at Zwolle to ‘protect’ women from the gaze of the male congrega-
tion, and to prevent the men being distracted from their religious duties by the
presence of women. The governors of the NIG were against this plan, but the barrier
was erected nevertheless.

In Enschede a power struggle arose between Hirsch and the administration regarding
Kashrut procedures: Hirsch considered that the certified butchers appointed by him
were, first and foremost, accountable to himself, but the congregational admini-
stration of Enschede thought otherwise. In this case Hirsch won, as he had sufficient
authority to bring the supplies of kosher meat to a standstill.

The conflict in Almelo was of a completely different nature: a portrait of a former
governor of the NIG in Almelo, Godfried Salomonson, which had been presented to
the Jewish community, was hung in the shul. However, Salomonson’s request for a
non-Jewish burial was reason enough for Hirsch to order the removal of his portrait
from a place of worship. The NIG in Almelo refused to obey Hirsch, but eventually
Godfried Salomonson’s son Hendrik had an annex built onto the synagogue to house
his father’s portrait.

In 1919 Chief Rabbi Hirsch became the leader of Agudat Israël, and continued as its
leader until he died from natural causes in 1941. His opponent in Overijssel was Ru
Cohen, the leader of De Deventer Vereniging (Deventer Society) which Cohen
founded in 1918 together with Schalom Fischer and Emile Visser. Ru Cohen spear-
headed this society until he went into hiding in 1943. The aim of both societies was
to train young people, mostly young foreigners, to become Palestine Pioneers. Ini-
tially De Deventer Vereniging established a ‘hakhshara’, or training course for the
Palestine Pioneers in which the ‘Haluzim’ or pioneers were accommodated in com-
munal dwellings. This system, however, was abandoned, not only because of the
high costs involved, but also because the young people learned more by living with
farmers. Ru Cohen died in Bergen Belsen concentration camp in 1945. Chief Rabbi
Hirsch’s involvement with the He-halutz pioneer federation started after Jewish
persecution in Germany had already begun in 1933, as his aim was to save as many
young orthodox German refugees as possible. For this reason, an orthodox hakh-
shara was founded in 1934 in Enschede under the auspices of Agudat Israël.

Besides the training provided by Zionists in Deventer and by Agudists in Enschede
there was a third possibility to become a Palestine pioneer: Dath Wā‘ārets of the
Mizrachim, which was a minor religious faction within the Zionist movement.

In 1934 De Deventer Vereniging founded a girls’ and a trade hakhshara. In the same
year Zionists and Mizrachim formed an alliance. Between 1940 and 1943 these three
movements were forced to amalgamate by the Germans. A relatively high number of Palestine Fighters survived the war, either because of their resistance work, or because they went underground.

After the war a new hakhshara was established in Deventer, which continued for a number of years before being forced to close its doors because of a lack of new Halutzim. De Deventer Vereniging no longer exists, neither does the Jewish community in Deventer. Many NIGs in Overijssel had to be disbanded after the war, because of a lack of Jewish members. In 1995 there are still four Jewish congregations in Overijssel. In Zwolle, Almelo, and Enschede the NIGs are affiliated to the Netherlands Jewish Church Denomination. There is also a liberal congregation in Enschede, but all these congregations were struggling for survival. Jews still live in Overijssel. Jewish Overijssel, however, belongs to the past.