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Jewish-Christianity and the Confessionalization of Amsterdam's Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jewish Community

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ABSTRACT

Until the second half of the seventeenth century, Jewish-Christianity at the margins of the Sephardic congregations of Amsterdam's Golden Age did not articulate itself as a conscious forging of bridges between two clearly distinct religions. Instead, it was a counterculture of Iberian conversos and Dutch Gentiles who resisted or ignored the confessionalization of Amsterdam's Iberian converso community and Christian churches. This essay analyzes several expressions of this Jewish-Christian counterculture against the background of the Confessional Age, namely inclusivist soteriologies, Jewish-Christian marital and other social relations, conversions of insufficiently confessionalized 'New Jews' back to Christianity, and Gentile converts to Judaism who failed to adopt a Jewish exclusivist rejection of Christianity.

KEYWORDS: Jewish-Christianity, confessionalization, seventeenth-century Amsterdam, conversion between Judaism and Christianity, Sephardic Jewish history

RESUMO

Até à segunda metade do século XVII, o Judeo-Cristianismo, marginal às congregações sefarditas da Época Dourada de Amesterdão, não se articulou enquanto uma construção consciente de pontes entre duas religiões claramente distintas. Pelo contrário, constitui-se como uma contracultura entre os conversos ibéricos e os gentios holandeses que resistiam ou ignoravam a confessionalização da comunidade conversa ibérica de Amesterdão e das suas igrejas cristãs. Este texto analisa várias expressões desta contracultura judaico-cristã face ao contexto da Era Confessional, nomeadamente as soteriologias inclusivistas, as relações matrimoniais e sociais entre judeus e cristãos, as conversões ao Cristianismo de judeus-novos que haviam sido insuficientemente confessionalizados, e os gentios convertidos ao Judaísmo que falharam em adoptar uma rejeição judaica exclusivista do Cristianismo.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Judeo-Cristianismo, confessionalização, Amsterdão no século XVII, conversão entre Judaísmo e Cristianismo, história dos judeus sefarditas

When scholars today apply the terms ‘Jewish-Christianity’ or ‘Judeo-Christianity’ (or *judéo-christianisme*, *judaico-cristianismo*, *Judeocristianismo*, and *Judenchristentum*) to pre-eighteenth-century people, groups, behaviors, and beliefs that are both Jewish and Christian, they describe something that did not exist in the language of that time.¹ The first known use of the term Jewish-Christianity is from 1718 (until then, we will stumble upon somewhat earlier uses of such a term, for instance in writings by religious entrepreneurs like the eccentric visionary Oliger Paulli, who, in 1696, wrote about a future ‘Jehovanic Church’ uniting Judaism and Christianity).² In that year, John Toland used the (unhyphenated) term ‘Jewish Christianity’ to characterize primitive Christianity as a Jewish reform movement.³ Before then, the only language that combined Judaism and Christianity referred to people rather than confessions and tended to be a negative expression that indicated an incomplete transition: ‘Christian Jews’ and ‘Jewish Christians’ designated converts from Judaism to Christianity (and never the other way around). In this, ‘Jews’ and ‘Jewish’ mostly served as caveats, suggesting these were Christians who were ‘too Jewish.’⁴ It was also used to delegitimize Christian opponents.⁵

Also the unofficial members of the subject of this essay, Jewish-Christianity *avant le mot* at the margins of the Portuguese converso community Amsterdam, were until late in the seventeenth century disinclined to use such general and

¹ See for a recent good discussion of Jewish-Christianity and its scholarly history: Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism: Collected Essays*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

² Oliger Paulli, *Noachs Duyve, of Goede Tydinge uyt Canaan...*, Amsterdam, 1696, p. 3.

³ On Toland’s use of the term, see Reed, *Jewish-Christianity...*, *op. cit.*, p. xxiv, and Matti Myllykoski, “‘Christian Jews’ and ‘Jewish Christians’: The Jewish Origins of Christianity in English Literature from Elizabeth I to Toland’s Nazarenus,” *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity: From Toland to Baur*. Ed. F. Stanley Jones, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2012, pp. 3-41.

⁴ This is based on an analysis of the English terms: Myllykoski, “‘Christian Jews’...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 5-30. The term was also used neutrally for “the ethnic Jews who joined the Jesus movement and who for a time continued to observe the Mosaic law to distinguish Jewish converts to Christianity” (p. 14). For the rare positive uses see p. 8 (according to a 1685 report, members of a religious group called themselves “Christian Jews”), and p. 17 (Protestant polemical use to point out the difference between the original church and the ecclesiastical additions of the Roman Catholic Church). Another positive use is not in English, but in Spanish and Portuguese. To some New Christians, their Jewish genealogy made them “the most authentic Christians.” José Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 48.

⁵ Myllykoski, “‘Christian Jews’...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 20.

positive denominators to describe what from a modern perspective appears a deliberate and principled non-exclusivist embrace of elements or people from both religions. Instead, when doing precisely these things they referred to more concrete things such as people, particular beliefs, or ritual actions. For instance, when in 1615 two Mennonite women who had been summoned by Amsterdam's Waterlander consistory denied that they had apostasized to Judaism, they stated that they "kept neutral between both, namely the Jews and the Christians" rather than between Judaism and Christianity.⁶ Also, the Reformed church members described in this essay who decided to observe the Jewish Shabbat – one of them while also continuing to observe the Christian Shabbat – did not think in those terms. Instead, and in contrast to their congregations' leadership, they saw no conflict between their church membership and adopting a practice that for others was a unique marker of Judaism. As a result, these Jewish Christians felt no need to put a label on their religious choice that indicated a bridge between two different confessions. There were also other expressions of what we would now define as Jewish-Christianity that consisted of actions rather than words, for instance in both baptizing and circumcising children.

How to approach this dissonance, this anachronism? In recent years, scholarly sensitivity to the fact that terms such as Jewish-Christianity did not exist before Toland has resulted in important historical revisions, in particular regarding Jewish-Christianity in the early Christian period. It has for instance prompted Daniel Boyarin, with many others, to challenge the traditional narrative of the "parting of the ways" in early Christianity. According to this traditional narrative, 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' were pre-existing entities, and their differences were at some point enacted.⁷ From that perspective, Jewish-Christianity means forging a bridge between these pre-existing entities. The problem with this narrative, Boyarin argues, is that in that historical period Christianity and Judaism did not exist as clearly separate entities. Rather, as Boyarin – or rather the back flap of his book – argues, "Jesus-following Jews and Jews who did not follow Jesus lived on a cultural map in which beliefs, such as that in a second divine being, and practices, such as keeping kosher or maintaining the Sabbath, were widely and variably

⁶ "beruchticht waren van het Jodendom;" "als nutrael houden tusschen beyden, te weten de Joden ende Christenen." Amsterdam, Stadsarchief (further as SA), Doopsgezinde Gemeente (1120), Memoriael van handelingen (117), p. 15 (11 May 1615).

⁷ Boyarin makes this argument in Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

distributed.”⁸ For Boyarin the question therefore is not why some people came to dwell in both ‘religions,’ but how heresiologists – Boyarin’s culprits of this process – created a new order of ‘religions’ out of what they had started to regard as an unacceptable chaos.⁹

The fact that until the seventeenth century’s conclusion no contemporary terms existed for those behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being of Amsterdam’s conversos and their Christian relations that were not exclusively Christian or Jewish, invites a similar reorientation of the scholarly gaze. This essay does so by looking beyond the conscious attempts to build bridges between the two religions. These emerge only later in the century with characters such as Paulli and, before him, among Christian millenarians and their Jewish contacts from mid-century on, who because of their attempts to fuse Jewish and Christian eschatological theologies and theodicies have been characterized by Richard Popkin as Christian Jews and Jewish Christians.¹⁰ These, however, desired to cross confessional boundaries that did not exist in their specific form before that. Therefore, the contours of Jewish-Christianity before this development only become visible when placed against the background of the work of Boyarin’s heresiologists’ seventeenth-century successors. These represented another, intense, wave of activity to formulate and institutionalize formal differences between the two religions, ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity,’ namely the confessionalization of European religions in general and that of Amsterdam’s Sephardic congregations in specific.

Thus, a real understanding of Jewish-Christianity at the margins of seventeenth-century Amsterdam needs to begin with analyzing the heresiologist efforts of Amsterdam’s Sephardic congregations of the Confessional Age, and I will therefore open this essay with such an analysis. Having done that, the essay’s main part will show that Jewish-Christianity at the margins of seventeenth-century Amsterdam can best be characterized as resistance to Jewish and Christian confessionalization, a counterculture that is implicitly rather than explicitly inclusivist and which therefore from a modern perspective can easily be mistaken for religious indifference rather than Jewish-Christianity. Only in the course of the century, when confessional identities are more firmly developed, Jewish-Christianity becomes more similar to what it is today, namely the crossing

⁸ Idem, *Ibidem*, back flap.

⁹ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. xiv.

¹⁰ Richard H. Popkin, “Christian Jews and Jewish Christians in the 17th Century,” *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Ed. Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1994, pp. 57-72.

of inter-religious bridges. I will do so by, in section two, exploring first the most explicit expression of Jewish-Christianity, namely inclusivist soteriologies, followed by section three's discussion of the implicit inclusivist soteriology of intermarriage and of raising children as both Christians and Jews. Sections four and five focus on converts between Judaism and Christianity, a type of religious action that one might expect to embody an exclusivist confessional mindset per se, but which I will demonstrate was the forefront of the resistance to create clear confessional differences.¹¹

Confessionalizing Amsterdam's Portuguese community

Toland's – and Paulli's – innovative language for bridging the confessional gap between Judaism and Christianity was a byproduct of what Ernst Troeltsch has coined “the confessional age” (*Konfessionelles Zeitalter*).¹² On the ruins of a united Christianity, the Western ecclesiastical and state powers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) is usually seen as this process' bloody catalyst – were shaping a form of society that was premised on the existence of mutually exclusive “churchdoms,” namely those of Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists. In this process, the shaping of the social, cultural, and legal characteristics of the modern state went hand in hand with the crystallization of clearly distinct confessions with their own dogmatic systems of doctrine and social discipline that were imposed by religious institutions and states together.¹³ As a result, a new linguistic category needed to be invented for beliefs, practices, and persons that did not clearly fit into this taxonomy.

Though somewhat slower than in its neighboring countries, the confessionalization of Dutch society brought public religious buildings, main welfare institutions, and education under the domain of the Dutch Reformed

¹¹ For Jewish polemical uses of proselytes to strengthen Jewish orthodoxy, see Miriam Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses: Crypto-Jewish Martyrdom in the Iberian World*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2007, pp. 178-180.

¹² Ernst Troeltsch, “Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt,” *Historische Zeitung*, vol. 97, 1906, pp. 1-66.

¹³ See for a brief characterization of the ‘confessional age’ Thomas Kaufmann, “Confessional Age,” *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, vol. 12. Ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al., Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2007, p. 390. See also Harm Klüeting, *Das Konfessionelle Zeitalter: Europa zwischen Mittelalter und Moderne*, Berlin, Primus, 2007; Stefan Ehrenpreis and Ute Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und Konfessionelles Zeitalter*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002.

Church. The latter, in turn, became increasingly dependent on the state, and local classes and regional synods worked to create uniformity of doctrine and practice.¹⁴ Whereas in these aspects Dutch confessionalization resembled that of its neighbors, unique to the Dutch Republic was that alongside the confessionalization of the privileged church and parts of the public realm also other religious communities consolidated their position in society and underwent confessionalization by their elites, creating specific religious identities and doctrinal communities.¹⁵

While in its open toleration of many religions a European outlier, Dutch religious pluralism was reflective of the nature of the early modern confessionalization. Rather than the religious homogenization of societies and the monopolization of one confession, confessionalization, in the words of Carsten Wilke, was “the institutionalization and theological standardization of religious difference.”¹⁶ In other words, the very process of confessionalization was deeply embedded in and contingent on religious pluralism, employed to delineate religious difference. Confessionalism was therefore not the alternative to religious pluralism, but a historical process parallel to and interdependent with the religious pluralization of early modern societies. The fact that the Early Modern period witnessed an increased knowledge of and interest in other denominations and religions does not contradict the confessionalization of confessional walls, but explains the origin and generation of the bricks it needed to build those walls.

Although Jewish communities had no political power in Early Modern Europe while confessionalization presupposes the role of a state, historians have observed this process also occurring among Early Modern Jewry.¹⁷ As Wilke writes, “the new political and theological competition among churches also became the frame

¹⁴ Joris van Eijnatten, Fred van Lieburg, *Nederlandse Religiegeschiedenis*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2005, pp. 172-174.

¹⁵ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 170; Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *1650: Bevochten eendracht: Nederlandse cultuur in Europese context*, The Hague, Sdu, 1999, p. 354.

¹⁶ Carsten Wilke, “Torah Alone: Protestantism as Model and Target of Sephardi Religious Polemics in the Early Modern Netherlands,” *Polemical Encounters: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond*. Ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019, pp. 357-376, there: p. 359.

¹⁷ Gerard Lauer, “Die Konfessionalisierung des Judentums: Zum Prozeß der religiösen Ausdifferenzierung im Judentum am Übergang zur Neuzeit,” *Interkonfessionalität - Transkonfessionalität - binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität: Neuere Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungsthese*. Ed. Kaspar von Greyerz, Manfred Jakobowski-Tiessen, Thomas Kaufmann, Hartmut Lehmann, Heidelberg, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003, pp. 250-283; Dean Phillip Bell, “Confessionalization and Social Discipline in Early Modern Germany: A Jewish Perspective,” *Politics and Reformations: Studies in Honor of Thomas A. Brady Jr.* Ed. Peter Wallace, Peter Starenko, Michael Printy, Christopher Ocker, Leiden, Brill, 2007, pp. 345-372.

of reference for a Jewish community that had ceased to be the only religious minority and that could take steps to carve out for Judaism a place in the mosaic of confessions.”¹⁸ The Iberian newcomers in Northern Europe, cosmopolitan and by experience aware of religious differences, were well-equipped for this.¹⁹

The historian of Dutch Judaism Yosef Kaplan, who has also argued that Early Modern Jewry underwent confessionalization, has suggested that we distinguish between Christian state-supported confessionalization and Jewish ‘soft confessionalization,’ and suggested to define the later as the erection of ‘barricades’ around Jewish communities.²⁰ However, it is clear that Amsterdam’s Jewish confessionalization was a joint effort of the Jewish congregations and the city’s magistrates. Whereas Amsterdam’s earliest charter with the Portuguese ‘merchant’ community posited that its members were to be Christians, the 1616 statutes, which were to remain in force until the Napoleonic period, required them – at least on paper – to be Jewish.²¹ This meant that the right of Portuguese conversos, nearly all of whom arrived in Amsterdam as Christians, to reside in Amsterdam was formally contingent on their Jewish confessional identity. Moreover, by giving the Jewish congregations the right to place conversos under a ban and by reserving their own right to judge appeals to it, Amsterdam’s magistrates exerted influence over the confessionalization of the Portuguese community. Together with the Jewish leadership, the city of Amsterdam thus enforced its Iberian conversos’ Jewishness.

And the confessionalizing of Amsterdam’s Portuguese conversos community could use this state support. It was, in the words of Miriam Bodian, “an utterly unfamiliar and bizarre entity [...] with its friars and nuns, its skeptics, its oblivious violators of the sabbath, and its technically non-Jewish members (those with gentiles in the female line).”²² They came from a social group that included people who believed, as did a converso from Evora in 1637, in the efficacy of offering Moses

¹⁸ Wilke, “Torah Alone...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.

¹⁹ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 360.

²⁰ Yosef Kaplan, “Between Christianity and Judaism in Early Modern Europe: The Confessionalization Process of the Western Sephardi Diaspora,” *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History: Exchange and Conflicts*. Ed. Lothar Gall and Dietmar Willoweit, *Schriften des Historischen Kollegs*, Munich, Vienna, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2011, pp. 307-341, there: p. 332.

²¹ On the 1598 resolution, see A. H. Huussen Jr, “Legislation on the Position of the Jews in the Dutch Republic, c. 1590-1796,” *The Legal History Review*, vol. 69, n.° 1-2, 2001, pp. 43-56, there: p. 48. For the text of the 1616 resolution, which contains a ‘Jewish’ oath, see: Hermanus Noordkerk, *Handvesten, ofte Privilegien ende Octroyen...*, vol. 2, Amsterdam, Van Waesberge and Schouten, 1748, pp. 472-473.

²² Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 134.

two Pater Nosters and two Ave Marias.²³ Others believed they could positively incorporate their Jewish pasts in their sincere Christianity.²⁴ In Amsterdam, where these Iberian conversos were free to join the Jewish congregations, Judaism was therefore not the default preference of religious adherence for the converso immigrants from Iberia: “Many New Christians wandered among the states and cities in the East and West for many years without being able to come to a final decision. Sometimes, after they had apparently determined to join Judaism, they changed their minds and retracted their decision.”²⁵

In fact, religion was not even the main marker of these conversos’ identity.²⁶ As Graizbord’s study of conversos returning to Spain and Portugal has shown, economic rather than religious reasons account for many converso departures from (and returns to) the Iberian peninsula.²⁷ It is therefore not surprising that Amsterdam’s Iberian immigrants first and foremost identified themselves as belonging to the *Nação* (‘the nation’), a term that according to Bodian “evoked an entire world of vivid memories and feelings.” In contrast, the identifier ‘the Jewish people’ “remained a somewhat cerebral theological concept – one that had its place primarily in the synagogue and in theological discussion.”²⁸ Only after being members of the *Nação*, Amsterdam’s Iberians were Jews, Christians, or Jewish Christians.

The Portuguese congregations felt threatened most, writes Kaplan, by those who “preferred to equivocate and refused, for various reasons, to identify themselves unequivocally as Jews and behave accordingly.”²⁹ As a result, the rabbis and lay leaders of Amsterdam’s Sephardic congregations embarked on an ambitious program to turn these New Christians into “New Jews,” as Kaplan has

²³ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 101.

²⁴ Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 94.

²⁵ Kaplan, “Between Christianity and Judaism...,” *op. cit.*, p. 318.

²⁶ David Graizbord, “Religion and Ethnicity among ‘Men of the Nation’: Toward a Realistic Interpretation,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 15, n.º 1, 2008, pp. 32-65, there: p. 33; Miriam Bodian, “‘Men of the Nation’: The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe,” *Past & Present*, n.º 143, 1994, pp. 48-76, there: pp. 49-51.

²⁷ Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute: Converso Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580-1700*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. See also Bodian, “Men of the Nation...,” *op. cit.*, p. 64.

²⁸ Bodian, *Hebrews...*, *op. cit.*, p. 133. Bodian and Kaplan have both pointed at the paradox between the confessionalization and Portuguese ethnic identity of Amsterdam’s converso community. Idem, “Men of the Nation...,” *op. cit.*, p. 72; Kaplan, “Between Christianity and Judaism...,” *op. cit.*, p. 329.

²⁹ Josef Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians and Stubborn New Jews: The Shaping of a Jewish Identity,” *Jewish History*, vol. 8, n.º 1-2, 1994, pp. 27-41, there: p. 27.

called them.³⁰ Amsterdam's Sephardic Jewish religious leadership (as well as that of other European Sephardic communities) therefore not only regulated Jewish religious life but also consciously constructed Jewish confessional community out of nothing.³¹

The first way the leadership of these congregations imposed conformity was by sanction. From the few early records of rulings, several disciplinary measures appear, such as the decision by the leadership of the Beit El congregation in 1620 to disallow access to the synagogue anyone who had not yet been circumcised by the New Year.³² Later, the united Talmud Torah community refused to bury those "members of the Nation" who, even though halakhically Jewish, had not joined the congregations and undergone circumcision. It also prevented them from receiving inheritances from Jewish family members, and it refused to include them in communal prayers for the dead.³³

These disciplinary measures were aimed in particular against "anything smacking of Catholicism or reminiscent of New Christian inclinations to imitate Catholic ways out of the Kahal and the *Nação*."³⁴ For instance, in 1632 the *imposta* (a joint financial board of Amsterdam's three Portuguese congregations) forbade the performance of festival plays reminiscent of Iberian Catholicism in synagogue.³⁵ Also, the leadership added restrictions to social interaction with Christians in addition to the two that the Christian authorities so feared, sexual relations and proselytization. A ban was put on anyone who sold or lent books to non-Jews, on Jewish women who cut the hair of gentile women, on those who engaged in religious discussions with Christians, and on those who circumcised without the permission of the Talmud Tora's leadership board, the *maamad*.³⁶ In 1639, Talmud Tora's *maamad* also ordered its members to "refrain from entering the churches of the Gentiles (*Igrejas dos goim*) during prayers of sermons, nor to go there to hear church music."³⁷ Another example was the decision of the *maamad* in 1665 not to

³⁰ Idem, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, p. 27.

³¹ Bodian, "Men of the Nation...", *op. cit.*, p. 49.

³² Kaplan, "Wayward New Christians...", *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³³ Bodian, "Men of the Nation...", *op. cit.*, p. 72. See for the confessionalization of women: Tirsah Levie Bernfeld, "Religious Life Among Portuguese Women in Amsterdam's Golden Age," *The Religious Cultures of Dutch Jewry*. Ed. Yosef Kaplan and Dan Michman, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 57-99, there: pp. 65-66.

³⁴ Daniel Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*, London, Portland, Ore., Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000, p. 242.

³⁵ Idem, *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Kaplan, *Alternative Path...*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

³⁷ Cited and translated in Idem, "The Portuguese Community of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth

allow the publication of the poet Daniel Levi de Barrios' *Flor de Apolo* because the text invoked Gentile deities, even though its examiner Ishac Naar stated that he was aware that its use had been for poetic, and not religious, reasons.³⁸

Also through instruction, conversos were coaxed into returning to Judaism. An example is – at least, so he told the Inquisition later – the case of the reluctant Esteban de Ares Fonseca, who was “introduced [...] into the company of a certain rabbi, whose name was Mortera, a preacher in the Torah of Moses, so as to convince him to practice [that religion].”³⁹ Only after he had stayed with Rabbi Saul Levi Mortera for more than half a year and was still unwilling to submit to the Law of Moses, force was used and Esteban was placed under a ban until he agreed to receive circumcision. To enable this instruction, the leaders and members of Amsterdam's Sephardic congregations produced compendia of *halakhah* in Spanish and Portuguese in an accessible style and with detailed descriptions of how to observe the Jewish law.⁴⁰ Amsterdam's Jewish religious leaders also responded to queries about halachic and doctrinal issues, such as questions whether circumcision had, like the Catholic sacraments, salvific power (it had not, they emphasized).⁴¹ Moreover, to sway the doubters, polemical literature pointed Amsterdam's conversos into the right direction, such as Mortera's *Obstaculos y oposiciones contra la Religion Xptiana*, a dialogue between two conversos, one who had returned to Judaism whereas the other had not.⁴²

Jewish-Christianity in Amsterdam

Despite the fact that much has been written about some of Amsterdam's Portuguese community's famous dissenters, namely Uriel da Costa, Juan de Prado, Daniel Ribeira, and Spinoza, “very little has come down to us from these

Century: Between Tradition and Change,” *Society and Community*. Ed. Abraham Haim, Jerusalem, Misgav Yerushalayim, Institute for Research of the Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage, 1991, pp. 141-171, there: p. 170.

³⁸ Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans...*, *op. cit.*, p. 244-247. See also Bodian, *Hebrews...*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

³⁹ Quoted in translation in Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians...,” *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Kaplan, “Between Christianity and Judaism...,” *op. cit.*, p. 337; Levie Bernfeld, “Religious Life...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

⁴¹ Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians...,” *op. cit.*, p. 33. This was written in a missive to the Jewish community of Bayonne.

⁴² Faur, *In the Shadow...*, *op. cit.*, p. 46. See on this missionary literature: Carsten Wilke, “Conversion ou retour? La métamorphose du nouveau chrétien en juif portugais dans l’imaginaire sépharade du XVIIe siècle,” *Mémoires juives d’Espagne et du Portugal*. Ed. Esther Benbassa, Paris, Publisud, 1996, pp. 53-67.

heterodox thinkers, and on the whole we learn about them from the polemics of their opponents.”⁴³ As a result, the extent to which members of the *Nação* resisted confessionalization is very much a matter of debate. On the one hand, scholars such as Yirmiyahu Yovel and David Graizbord argue that a not-insignificant part of the Iberian diaspora, including the Portuguese community of Amsterdam, refused to become confessionalized Jews. Yovel characterized this attitude as “a new kind of marranism,” a resistance to any religious coercion including that of the Jewish community.⁴⁴ Graizbord has likewise argued that many abandoned “mainstream, rabbinic Judaism for a variety of mystical-messianic rationalistic, or wholly equivocal alternatives,” remained Christians, or reverted to Christianity after having joined Jewish congregations.⁴⁵ Although Kaplan views Amsterdam’s conversos as more conforming than do Yovel and Graizbord, he also added several other Kolakowski-inspired epithets to characterize resistance to confessionalization: “Jews without community,” “Jews without halakhah,”⁴⁶ and “Jews without Judaism.”⁴⁷ On the other end of the spectrum is Daniel Swetschinski who, dismissive of what he regards as the need to solve the “psychological problems in terms of faith and knowledge,”⁴⁸ has instead argued that “the reintegration of former New Christians into a Jewish community proceeded rather smoothly.”⁴⁹

The difference in scholarly views on the confessionalization of Amsterdam’s Portuguese merchant community echoes an older debate on the nature of the converso identity, namely two paradigms about post-1391 converso religiosity. The first, identified with Yitzhak Baer, Haim Beinart, and Yosef Yerushalmi premised that conversos were suffering Jews who desired to return to Judaism.⁵⁰ That perspective invites looking at the confessionalization of Amsterdam’s conversos as a natural process. According to the other paradigm, which is generally associated with Benzion Netanyahu and António José Saraiva, Iberian

⁴³ Kaplan, “Portuguese Community...,” *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁴⁴ Yovel, *Other Within...*, *op. cit.*, p. 292. See also idem, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁵ Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute...*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Kaplan, “Portuguese Community...,” *op. cit.*, p. 154. Leszek Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église: La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969.

⁴⁷ Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians...,” *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174.

⁴⁹ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 277. This argument is also adopted by Renée Levine Melammed, *A Question of Identity: Iberian Conversos in Historical Perspective*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 75-79.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the position of the conversos as the ‘suffering Jew,’ see Graizbord, “Religion and Ethnicity...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 33-38.

conversos had become Christian in every sense (and Inquisitorial accusations of crypto-Judaism that reflected Christian anti-Semitism rather than actual converso beliefs recreated their Judaism).⁵¹ The premise at the basis of this model is that Jewish identity of conversos is something that is made rather than an inherent converso trait. In this framework, the Judaization of Amsterdam's conversos is not a self-evident process.

A better, if more modest, approach to unlock the converso mind is to abandon the attempt at creating a uniform image and instead recognize the diversity of converso attitudes, from Iberia to Amsterdam, to Christianity and Judaism. Rather than inherently Jewish or solely the product of the Christian environment, Iberian converso religiosity occupied a great range. This was already observed by the late fourteenth-century Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshbeth Perfet, and also recent scholarship has recognized this.⁵² In the words of José Faur, there were “those who wanted to be Christians and have nothing to do with Judaism, those who wanted to be Jewish and have nothing to do with Christianity, those who wanted to be both, and those who wanted to be neither.”⁵³

This model of a wide range of converso attitudes toward Judaism and Christianity is the most productive to understand the confessionalization of Amsterdam's conversos. A number of these easily adopted Judaism whereas others needed to be convinced or coerced either to relinquish, respectively, their exclusive attachment to Christianity, their explicit Jewish-Christianity, or their skepticism, and be made to embrace an exclusively Jewish confessional identity. There is sufficient evidence that there was resistance. For many years, as also Swetschinski despite his argument for an easy confessionalization has noted, a number of Amsterdam's conversos remained unaffiliated to the Jewish congregations.⁵⁴ For instance, Amsterdam's notarial acts contain many Portuguese names that cannot be found in the congregational membership lists, and also the foundation myth that depicts Amsterdam's Portuguese community as from its very beginning a confessional Jewish congregation has in recent years come under critical scrutiny.⁵⁵

⁵¹ For a discussion of Netanyahu and Saraiva's position, see Yosef Kaplan, *Zwischen "Neuchristen" und "neuen Juden": Die verschlungenen Wege von Kryptojuden und westlichen Sefarden in der Frühen Neuzeit: 16. Arye Maimon-Vortrag an der Universität Trier, 6. November 2013*, Trier, Kliomedien, 2014, p. 13.

⁵² Idem, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, Oxford, New York, Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 326-327.

⁵³ Faur, *In the Shadow...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41. See also Kaplan, “Between Christianity and Judaism...,” *op. cit.*, p. 309.

⁵⁴ Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans...*, *op. cit.*, p. 175. See also Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians...,” *op. cit.*, p. 29. On women see Levie Bernfeld, “Religious Life...,” *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ On notarial acts: Kaplan, *Alternative Path...*, *op. cit.*, p. 112; on the founding myth: Swetschinski, *Reluctant*

Unconfessional liaisons

One of the expressions of the unwillingness of conversos to commit to Judaism was marriage with Dutch Christians. Already in Spain and Portugal conversos tended to marry within the converso community. Therefore, marriages with Old Christians therefore indicated that the converso side was either a convinced Christian or less averse to marriages between conversos and Old Christians than the converso majority.⁵⁶ Such is, for instance, Yosef Kaplan's observation in critical reminiscence of his 1982 characterization of Isaac Orobio de Castro as on a determined path to Judaism from early on. Kaplan points in his reassessment at among others Orobio's marriage to an Old Christian as evidence that "Orobio's path from Christianity to Judaism was neither necessary nor marked out in advance."⁵⁷ Such marriages between conversos and Dutch Christians also took place in Amsterdam, even though there conversos could and were expected by the Christian authorities and Jewish religious leadership to live as Jews.

A number of such alliances involved a religious conversion by one of the two sides. For instance, the Reformed Church council reported in 1620 that the children of Hans Pastes "married with Jews and can be counted as among them."⁵⁸ An example of the other direction is Jan Pontremo, to whose marriage with Grietgen Carstians the city agreed on the condition he would first convert to Lutheranism.⁵⁹ Other marrying couples were however little interested in confessional conformity. In 1604, Emanuel or Manoel Gomes and Neeltje Jans registered with Amsterdam's municipality for marriage. Gomes was a converso born in Aveiro in Portugal and had no official religious affiliation, and Jans was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. The parents of the bride signed their consent, but Gomes' mother, who had two years prior agreed to sign Manoel's sister's wedding registration, refused to sign with the excuse that she could not

Cosmopolitans..., *op. cit.*, pp. 168-172.

⁵⁶ On intermarriages in Iberia: Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans...*, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁵⁷ Kaplan, "'From Christianity to Judaism' Revisited: Some Critical Remarks More than Thirty Years after its Publication," *Isaac Orobio: The Jewish Argument with Dogma and Doubt*. Ed. Carsten Wilke, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 15-29, there: p. 23.

⁵⁸ "met de Joden trouwen ende onder haer gerekent worden." I.H. van Eeghen, "De gereformeerde kerkeraad en de joden te Amsterdam," *Amstelodamum*, vol. 47, November 1960, p. 174.

⁵⁹ Amsterdam, SA, Schout en Schepenen (5061, further as SS), Confessieboeken (292), fls. 109-110 (24 May 1619).

do so without the permission of her absent husband. Two months later, the city married them anyway, citing the factor of Jans' pregnancy.⁶⁰ Like Gomes, who evidently defied his parents' wish to marry within his community, also Neeltje Jans appeared to have been loosely attached to her Reformed Church membership, because a year and a half earlier her church's council had prevented her from getting married – I assume with Gomes – in the Catholic Church.⁶¹ In April 1606, their son was brought for baptism to the Dutch Reformed Old Church (Oude Kerk), for which two Dutch Christians signed as witnesses.⁶²

Like Gomes and Jans, also Jacomo Fernandez, or Jacques Franco or Jacques Mortelier, of Lissabon, appears to have pragmatically navigated the separating confessional waters. Fernandez and Anna Jansdr married in 1609, at which time Fernandez claimed he was a Christian. In 1619, shortly after Jansdr had died, someone who had spoken with her at her sickbed testified in front of the Reformed Church council that she had told him that she had been married to “a Jew Jacques Mortelier” and that of their five children “two or three [namely the boys] the father had circumcised, and the mother had baptized.” This resulted in the church council appealing to the city's mayors for custody over these children.⁶³ Several months later, the city interrogated Fernandez, who stated “to be Jew of religion and not to know of which religion was Anna Jans.” He did confess to know that “she never went to the synagogue and that she was buried in a Christian manner.” He continued to state that his sons had been circumcised and that one of his daughters had been buried at the Jewish cemetery of Ouderkerk.⁶⁴ In the year following, he registered for marriage with a Jewish widow.⁶⁵

Gomes and Fernandez' cases are examples of the common phenomenon of intermarriage in the Dutch Republic. According to historian Benjamin J. Kaplan, male children were in the Dutch Republic often raised in their father's religious tradition, and the girls in that of the mother.⁶⁶ While nothing more is known of

⁶⁰ Van Eeghen, “De kinderen van Hansken Hangebroeck,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* vol. 11, n.º1, 1977, pp. 33-39, there: p. 34.

⁶¹ On Neeltje Jans' attempt to marry in a Catholic Church, see Amsterdam, SA, Hervormde Gemeente (376, further as HG), Kerkeraad (3), fls. 89v, 90, 92v (9 and 16 January, 27 February 1603).

⁶² Amsterdam, SA, Doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken (5001), Oude Kerk (4), p. 161 (6 April 1606).

⁶³ “2 of 3 kindertjes waren die den vader heeft laten besnijden, door de Moeder heeft se laten doopen.” Amsterdam, SA, HG, Kerkeraad (4), p. 343 (13 June 1619).

⁶⁴ “Seide dat hij van religie Jode is van niet te weten van wat religie ... Anna Jans was ... maer wel dat sij noyt is naer synagogue gegaen ende is inde christelijcke religie begraven.” Amsterdam, SA, SS, Confessieboeken (292), fl. 132 (19 October 1619).

⁶⁵ Van Eeghen, “Kinderen...,” *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁶⁶ On the generally condemned but widespread phenomenon of intermarriage in the early Dutch

Gomes' children than that one son was baptized, Fernandez's children were both baptized and circumcised. What is interesting is that the Dutch records do not report of any conflict between the parents, something they certainly would not have failed to mention, and it seems thus that despite Fernandez's unconvincing claim to have been ignorant of his deceased wife's religious life, each parent consented to raise the children in both religions.

Even when conversos did join a Jewish congregation and married as Jews, it not necessarily meant that their religious attitudes reflected the confessionalizing desires of their religious leadership. As Kaplan has shown, even those who joined the congregations were not always submissive, and "were critical of the halakha as interpreted by the rabbis and of the traditional leadership."⁶⁷ One example of this refusal to gird the confessional harness is converso visits to the temples of idolatry, Christian churches, such as can be gleaned from the aforementioned Talmud Tora 1639 decree that Jews should not attend church services and enter churches to listen to music.⁶⁸

But Jewish-Christianity not only lurked in converso visits to Christian sites of worship. Also Gentile Christians attended against the explicit wishes of their own churches synagogue services, such as shows a 1639 complaint in the Reformed Church's minutes.⁶⁹ Also Jewish sources reveal this. In 1640, for example, Talmud Tora forbade its congregants to get up from their seats during services to speak with *goyim*.⁷⁰ Five years later, in 1645, it ordered its beadle, the convert Abraham Perengrino, to prevent Gentiles from entering the synagogue during the prayers.⁷¹ True, many of these visits were expressions of the budding of modern tourism or of social-business relations.⁷² Nevertheless, it is telling that, for instance, the 1612 report of Amsterdam's Reformed Church consistory about

Republic, see Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 276. On children's faith being determined according to gender, according to Kaplan the most common accommodation, see p. 288 (there he also describes other accommodations, such as alternation in birth order, which was common in the next century, or, in other European places, according to the father, or to the husband, for which purpose girls were kept religiously 'neutral' until they married).

⁶⁷ Kaplan, "Portuguese Community..." *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁶⁸ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 170.

⁶⁹ See for instance a protest against this: Amsterdam, SA, HG, Kerkeraad (7), p. 283 (24 February 1639).

⁷⁰ Kaplan, "For Whom did Emanuel de Witte Paint his Three Pictures of the Sephardic Synagogue in Amsterdam?," *Studia Rosenthaliana*, vol. 32, n.º 2, 1998, p. 138.

⁷¹ Amsterdam, SA, Portugees-Israëlietische Gemeente (334, further as PIG) Escamoth (19), p. 183 (2 January 1645).

⁷² On Christian tourism, see Kaplan, "Emanuel de Witte..." *op. cit.*, pp. 135-137.

the proselytization of Jan Adriaensz Soggaert by the Jew Mendes followed an earlier one about Soggaert's attendance of a Catholic mass in Antwerp together with a group of other Dutch Calvinists. Visiting the Other's houses of worship was, at least for the church consistory, a sign of a weak confessional attachment.⁷³

Soggaert's case is an example of that throughout the seventeenth century, not only Jewish but also Christian resistance to confessionalization was strong in the Dutch Republic. According to the estimation of the historian A. Th. van Deursen, in the period of the end of the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century, a small part of the Christian population – in 1597, for instance, only 10% – was an official church member.⁷⁴ While most of the Dutch Gentiles were so-called *liefhebbers*, Christians who were not church members but nevertheless took part in church life, the next sections show that Gentile non-confessionalism could also lead to participation in Jewish religious life.

Cada uno se puede salvar en su ley

As I argued at the beginning of the essay, it is this refusal to abide by the confessional borders that others were throwing up rather than building bridges between two well-defined confessions that characterizes early modern Jewish-Christianity. But what were its expressions aside from ignoring religious leadership's demands for social behavior conform religious exclusivism? The following sections explore three forms of Jewish-Christianity at the margins of Amsterdam's Sephardic Jewish congregations, namely beliefs that salvation can be achieved along different religious paths; conversions, or reversions, of conversos to Christianity; and Gentile conversions to Judaism or other forms of Gentile Judaization.

The decision of Jacob Fernandez and Anna Jansdr to have their sons both baptized and circumcised could have been an expression of religious cynicism. These children might have been the object of a religious struggle between their parents, both of whom wanted them to grow up in their own religion. More likely however, and this also better explains why they married in the first place, is that

⁷³ Amsterdam, SA, HG, Kerkeraad (3), fl. 270v (4 January 1612). On his visit to Catholic mass: fls. 216v-217 (30 July and 6 August 1609).

⁷⁴ A. Th. van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen: Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarnevelt*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1974, pp. 128-129.

neither of them believed that the salvation of their own children was contingent on being raised in the one and true religion. If, to return to Benjamin Kaplan's description, parents decided to raise the boys in the father's religion and the girls in that of the mother, did that mean that both parents were willing to send off into damnation, along with their spouse, a part of their offspring? More likely is that their soteriological beliefs were more inclusivist.

Historian Stuart Schwartz has shown that much of the religious relativism among the famous early modern Iberian exiles such as Spinoza was not the result of Jewish freedom from Iberian repression but, on the contrary, an Iberian import. This relativism was rooted in one of the many Iberian soteriological beliefs, namely that salvation can be attained through more than one religion. Spain's many folksy Menocchios, Stuart argues, were interested in salvation rather than in Christological doctrines. Whereas the church jealously guarded the latter, it did not interfere in this bewildering variety of soteriological beliefs. Among these was the notion, embodied in the Spanish saying *cada uno se puede salvar en su ley*: "each person can be saved in his own religion."⁷⁵ Such was for instance the belief expressed by Juan de Prado, Spinoza's companion in Amsterdam, when he still lived in Spain. There, de Prado had told Isaac Orobio de Castro with whom he was friendly, that:

at bottom, all religions recognize the same God, which is Aristotle's first cause. Religions differ only politically, in how they order the life of the community, but this is not what salvation depends upon, Salvation depends on knowing God, so every man can be saved by following his own religion.⁷⁶

These soteriologies were not necessarily preludes to religious skepticism, as had been the case with Prado after his arrival in Amsterdam. They were also adapted to the specific circumstances of Amsterdam's Judaizing Portuguese community. For instance, the members of Amsterdam's Sephardic congregations worried about the future fate of the souls of family members who were still living as Christians in Spain or Portugal or in other 'lands of idolatry.' This prompted Talmud Tora's junior rabbi Moses Raphael d'Aguilar (c. 1615-1679) to reiterate Maimonides' forgiving attitude towards Jewish apostates to Islam, namely that,

⁷⁵ Stuart B. Schwartz, *All can be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World*, New Haven, Mass., Yale University Press, 2008, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Yovel, *The Other Within...*, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

provided they had been living virtuous lives, Israelites who had been coerced to live as Christians had “a portion in the world to come.”⁷⁷ Aguilar’s statement is an example how Amsterdam’s Sephardic rabbis, responsible for the Judaization of the conversos and fiercely condemning those who could but chose not to revert to Judaism, found themselves in a paradoxical situation. This situation, as Kaplan has pointed out, was that the flourishing of Amsterdam’s confessionalizing Sephardic community was dependent on the close personal ties between its members and their Christian family members and trade partners in the lands of idolatry.⁷⁸

Such an explicit non-exclusive soteriology is found in a letter from Israel Benedeti, a proselyte who in 1682 appears several times in Talmud Tora’s *Livro Longo* as one of its recipients of charity.⁷⁹ In this letter, written to his Lutheran mother, the former Benedictus Sebastian Sperling tries to temper the shock of his conversion by offering an inclusivist soteriology: “Am I of the opinion,” Sperling wrote, “that all men and women who remain Lutherans will be condemned? I answer and declare that the pure in heart, both Lutherans and Reformed, will be saved. Let my soul be exchanged for theirs if I speak in hypocrisy (I write this in my own hand).”⁸⁰ Sperling, who in the letter also claimed to have documentation proving that his father, unbeknownst to his mother, was of Jewish descent, was faced with the same problem as many other of Amsterdam’s Jews, namely that they had family members they cared for who were Christians. Sperling’s answer, like that of many others, was an inclusivist soteriology.

Conversions (or reversos?) to Christianity

Many early modern converts, whether from Judaism to Christianity or the other way around, explained their religious choice in exclusivist terms, namely

⁷⁷ Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 117. In contrast, some rabbis declared husbands who refused to leave their Christian lives as no longer Jewish in order to enable their wives to remarry: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso, a Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics*, New York, London, Columbia University Press, 1971, p. 25.

⁷⁸ Kaplan, “Between Christianity and Judaism...,” *op. cit.*, p. 329.

⁷⁹ Amsterdam, SA, PIG, *Livro Longo* (217), pp. 310, 339.

⁸⁰ Gerald Strauss, “A Seventeenth-Century Conversion to Judaism: Two Letters from Benedictus Sperling to His Mother, 1682,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 36, n.° 2, 1974, pp. 166-174, there: p. 171; Alexander van der Haven, “Eschatology and Conversion in the Sperling Letters,” *500 Years of Reformation: Jews and Protestants. Judaism and Protestantism*. Ed. Aya Elyada, Moshe Sluhovsky, Christian Wiese, Irene Aue-Ben-David, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter, (forthcoming).

as a formal change of adherence of one religion to another on which often the salvation of their souls was dependent. Converted Jews such as Frederic Ragstatt de Weile (1648-1729) polemicized against Judaism and argued that only through Christ one could attain salvation, and along adopted negative views of Jews and Judaism to prove their religious loyalty.⁸¹ Likewise, Christians such as the aforementioned Jan Pieterszn embraced the law of Moses because they believed their salvation was contingent on it.⁸² A fascinating example of how a proselyte thought to adopt the confessionalizing desires of his adopted community is that Pieterszn's acquaintance Hans Joostenszn, who had been a beadle at Amsterdam's Bet Jacob or Neve Shalom roughly between 1607 and 1612.⁸³ As Joostenszn later narrated the story of his conversion, he had pursued circumcision despite the claim of the Englishman who had brought him in Danzig to Judaism that circumcision was not necessary.⁸⁴ Furthermore, he emphasized that he had committed himself to rabbinical Judaism rather than joined the Karaites, and even specified that, "because he thought that to be most proper," he had converted to the tribe from which, at least according to an eighteenth-century source, Amsterdam's Portuguese Jews claimed descent, namely the tribe of Judah.⁸⁵

As Sperling's example however shows, 'proper' religious confessionalism was not the sole path of the early modern convert between Judaism and Christianity. In fact, as this and the next section on converts demonstrate, Jewish-Christianity in early modern Amsterdam could often be found in particular among converts to and out of Amsterdam's Sephardic congregations. This should not be surprising in the case of this section's subject, namely conversos who had returned to Judaism in Amsterdam and then again converted, or reverted, to Christianity. Since many Iberian Jews who had converted to Christianity had been coerced to do so, one should not expect them to embrace an exclusivist Christianity immediately. A good example is a (reported) statement by the converso Simón de Santa Clara of Calatayud in 1489, which combined skepticism – he also argued that there is nothing beyond death and birth – with religious universalism: "I have kept the

⁸¹ On Ragstatt, see: J. Haitsma, *Fridericus Ragstat a Weille (1648-1729): De eerste joodse predikant in de Nederlandse Gereformeerde (Hervormde) Kerken*, Leiden, Groen, 1989.

⁸² Alexander van der Haven, "Conversion on Trial: Toleration of Apostasy and the Hoorn Trial of Three Converts to Judaism (1614–5)," *Contesting Inter-Religious Conversion in the Medieval World*. Ed. Yaniv Fox and Yosi Yisraeli, New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 41-60, there: p. 47.

⁸³ Idem, "Predestination and Toleration: The Dutch Republic's Single Judicial Persecution of Jews in Theological Context," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 71, n.º 1, 2018, pp. 165-205, there: pp. 171-172.

⁸⁴ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 171.

⁸⁵ Van der Haven, "Conversion on Trial...", *op. cit.*, p. 49; Kaplan, *Alternative Path...*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

Holy Law of Moses. I have kept the law of Jesus Christ, and if right now Saint Muhammad appeared, by God! I would keep all three; and if all were to end tomorrow, I would not fear God because I had walked in all three laws.”⁸⁶

It is such an attitude, a loose and often skeptical stance towards confessional commitment, which explains why some of Amsterdam’s Judaized conversos converted again to Christianity. Reversion to Christianity was rarer in Amsterdam than in other Iberian diaspora converso communities, but scholars explain this with the wealth of Amsterdam’s Portuguese community rather than its religious fervor.⁸⁷ Moreover, they did take place. Some of these left the Republic, such as Paulo de Pena who became in Rouen an active witness against Jews for the local church.⁸⁸ Others remained in the Dutch Republic, such as Isaac Palache, who had studied and taught Hebrew at Leiden University and converted somewhere before 1629. Most other known cases are from the second half of the century, such as Abraham Herrera (1659), Hester Palache (before 1667), Jacob Netto (1674), Eva Cohen, Sara Lombrosa and Rachel Cornel (all three in 1680), Aharon Gabai Faro (1683), and Mordechai Cohen, who was probably Eva Cohen’s brother (1688).⁸⁹ Others, such as Isaac de Rocamora in 1650 and Samuel Aboab in 1659, approached Amsterdam’s Reformed consistory for conversion but were refused. Its protocols also report that Aboab’s relative Sara de Pas made confessional statements to the Reformed consistory in 1666 and 1667, but it is not clear if she converted – the report states that she was not considered sufficiently certain in her faith to be allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper.⁹⁰ Also Gratia Moreno’s religious fate is unknown: In 1654 she claimed to Amsterdam’s legal authorities that Talmud Tora had excommunicated her, not because she had prostituted herself as the Jewish authorities had claimed, but because she wanted to convert to Christianity.⁹¹

As the details of these conversions reveal, most of these converts were as little firm in their rekindled Christianity as they had been in their refound Judaism.

⁸⁶ Schwartz, *All Can be Saved...*, *op. cit.*, p. 43. See also David Martin Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1996, p. 121.

⁸⁷ Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-97; Levie Bernfeld, “Religious Life...,” *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁸⁸ Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans...*, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

⁸⁹ On Netto, see Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans...*, *op. cit.*, p. 237; on Eva Cohen (after her conversion called Elizabeth Verboon), see Gilbert Burnet, *De ware bekeringe en violente vervolgingen van Eva Cohen, nu genaemt Elisabeth...* [s.l.], [s.n.], [s.d.]. Sources on the other converts are referred to below.

⁹⁰ Herman Roodenburg, *Onder censuur: De kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam, 1578-1700*, Hilversum, Verloren, 1990, p. 188.

⁹¹ Amsterdam, SA, SS, Confessieboeken (310), fls. 56v, 57, 63, 64, 70v.

Although there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Palache's conversion to Christianity in the 1620s, for it cost him his mother's inheritance and reduced him and his wife and five children to poverty, in 1643 informants told Amsterdam's church consistory that Palache had "apostatized again, circumcised his sons and again taken up the Jewish religion."⁹²

There are several cases similar to Palache's. In 1673, Amsterdam's Reformed church members and former Jews Hester Palache – likely a family relation – and her husband Simon Samuel were summoned to the church council after reportedly circumcising their sons and accepting the Jewish 'Easter bread' from family. Her answer was interesting because it suggests she expected leniency from the consistory: Hester claimed that the circumcision was the result of family pressure, and that she deliberately had stayed away from home when the circumcision took place. Moreover, although they had eaten the 'Easter bread,' they had done so "without Jewish ceremony."⁹³ Several reports from the Reformed Church consistory from 1680 and 1681 also expressed concern about the religion of the converts Sara Lombrosa and Rachel Cornel.⁹⁴ Another interesting case is that of the convert Mordechai Cohen, who married the Christian woman Maria Catharina Vackers, but who upon his death in 1696 was buried not in a Christian cemetery, but in – the section "inferior to that of the negroes" of – Amsterdam's Portuguese congregation's cemetery Bet Haim.⁹⁵

In other cases, the motives to convert were already suspicious. For instance, after having sworn to join a ship crew of the East India Company in exchange for his release from the prison to which his family had submitted him, Abraham Herrera escaped from boarding the ship by converting to Christianity. He moved in with a beadle of Amsterdam's Reformed Church but soon was caught stealing from his benefactor.⁹⁶ Another disappointment was Samuel Aboab. The Christian enthusiasm about his desire to convert quickly subsided when reports emerged that he had been visiting whorehouses from which he also, as well as from his

⁹² "Dat hij wederom is afgefallen: Sijn kinderen laten besnijden – ende wederom het Jodendom heeft aengenomen." Amsterdam, SA, HG, Kerkeraad (7), p. 497 (27 August 1643). The first report of his Christianity is from 1629: W. P. C. Knuttel, *Acta der particuliere synoden van Zuid-Holland 1621-1700*, vol. 2 (1635-1654), *Rijks-geschiedkundige publicatiën. Kleine serie*, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1908, p. 29.

⁹³ Roodenburg, *Onder censuur...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.

⁹⁴ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 188.

⁹⁵ He was also known as Francisco Pedro Cohen Palache: Amsterdam, SA, Notarieel Archief (5075), F. Tixanderet (370), pp. 339-344 (17 August 1688). His burial is listed in Amsterdam, SA, PIG, *Livro de Bet Haim* (916), p. 104 (16 May 1696).

⁹⁶ Roodenburg, *Onder censuur...*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

aunt, had stolen. It also turned out that he had a criminal record and that he in cooperation with Jacques Gedelliau, ‘the Devil of Vlooienburg,’ had been suspected of passing letters from eminent Amsterdam merchants to the Spanish ambassador.⁹⁷ Likewise, the Reformed church council refused Rocamora who like Lena before him had been unsuccessful in making a living as a physician in the Portuguese community, because it suspected him of being motivated by his financial troubles, and they had “too often been defrauded” by such people.⁹⁸

The ease with which these Iberians converted between Judaism and Christianity can also be explained by a positive, non-exclusivist, attitude towards Calvinism – all of the cases above converted, or tried to convert, to Calvinism – and its effect, namely non-exclusivist conversions. Such an attitude is for instance subtly present in the spiritual autobiography of the proselyte Manuel Cardoso de Macedo, probably composed at the end of the 1610s. In his *Vida*, Cardoso, now Abraham Pelengrino, depicts the Calvinism to which he converted from Catholicism before finally converting to Judaism only in favorable terms, namely as an anti-idolatrous phase that set the stage for his conversion to Judaism.⁹⁹ This, I suggest, rather than being a mere narrative construction, shows the affinity some Jews saw between Calvinist Christianity and Judaism.

A later example of a positive attitude towards Calvinism was propagated by De Barrios who in his *Triumpho* (1683) claimed that the Dutch Calvinists were the aforementioned descendants of Shem’s offspring Yoktan, and that the Noahide laws followed by Yoktan’s Jewish wife were inherent in the doctrines of the Calvinist religion.¹⁰⁰ Although Carsten Wilke has argued against speaking of a Jewish-Christian rapprochement in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, Cardoso and de Barrios’ attitudes were likely representative of many Iberian immigrants, who, it should be emphasized here, never referred to the Netherlands as a land of idolatry.¹⁰¹ It seems therefore that rabbi Mortera’s diatribes in 1659

⁹⁷ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 187; S.B.J. Zilverberg, “Jan Pieterszoon Beelthouwer (± 1603-± 1669) en de Joden,” *Studia Rosenthaliana*, vol. 3, n.º 2, 1969, pp. 156-167, there: pp. 163-164.

⁹⁸ Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans...*, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

⁹⁹ B.N. Teensma, “De levensgeschiedenis van Abraham Perengrino, alias Manuel Cardoso de Macedo,” *Studia Rosenthaliana*, vol. 10, n.º 1, 1976, pp. 1-36, there: pp. 7-12.

¹⁰⁰ Limor Mintz-Manor, “The Phoenix, the Exodus and the Temple: Constructing Self-Identity in the Sephardi Congregation of Amsterdam in the Early Modern Period,” *The Religious Cultures of Dutch Jewry*. Ed. Yosef Kaplan and Dan Michman, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 3-33, there: pp. 25-26. See also Bodian, *Hebrews...*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Wilke, “Clandestine Classics: Isaac Orobio and the Polemical Genre among the Dutch Sephardim,” *Isaac Orobio: The Jewish Argument with Dogma and Doubt*. Ed. Carsten Wilke, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 57-76, there: p. 57. Kaplan also points out that the Sephardic leadership was more anti-

against Calvinism and anti-Trinitarian Socinianism as ‘mental idolatry’ were a reaction to the positive attitudes of some of the members of his congregation toward Calvinists, anti-Trinitarians, and other Christian dissenters.¹⁰² And indeed, some entertained social and even religious relations with such Christians. Spinoza, as is well-known, was in close contact with Collegiants, and in writings of Paulli and the proselyte Moses Germanus from the 1690s one can find descriptions of social gatherings in Amsterdam in which Jews, Socinians, and others met for debates.¹⁰³

Judaizing Christians

Jewish and Christian congregational records show that in addition to Jews converting to Christianity, also (Gentile) Christians embraced ‘Jewish’ beliefs and practices and attended Jewish religious meetings. Some of these formally converted to Judaism. Others chose to ‘live and die as Jews’ but were either barred from joining a Jewish congregation or did not desire to join a Jewish congregation – of the latter group some even maintained church membership.

Remarks from proselytes or their Jewish relations about Christianity and Judaism often show the desire to find commonalities between Christianity and Judaism. One way was to remind their audience of Jewish-Christianity among the early Christians. This for instance can be seen in the conclusion of the anti-Christian polemic *Keset Jeonatan* (‘Jonathan’s bow’), written by the proselyte Jeonatan Guer, whose daughter was married to a son of Jan Pieterszn and who likely settled in Amsterdam after having avoided arrest in Hoorn in 1614.¹⁰⁴ Although intended to delegitimize Christianity by showing its inconsistent history, Jeonatan Guer emphasized that many of the earliest Christians had continued to observe the Jewish law.¹⁰⁵ By doing so, Jeonatan Guer offered Jewish-Christianity as a meeting point between the two religions. Another interesting example of

Christian than contemporary Ashkenazim: Kaplan, *Alternative Path...*, *op. cit.*, p. 22. See also Bodian, *Hebrews...*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁰² Bodian, *Hebrews...*, *op. cit.*, p. 72. Also Mortera had had contact with Socinians: Henry Méchoulan, “Morteira et Spinoza au carrefour du Socinianisme,” *Revue des Études Juives*, vol. 135, 1976, pp. 51-65.

¹⁰³ For instance, Paulli and Germanus first met at a Socinianian dispute: Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Philosemitismus im Barock: Religions- und geistesgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1952, p. 68.

¹⁰⁴ Amsterdam, Ets Haim Library, EH 48 A 01 (1664/5). This is a Portuguese manuscript claiming to be a translation from the original Dutch in 1600. On Jeonatan Guer and Pieterszn, see Van der Haven, “Predestination and Toleration...,” *op. cit.*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁵ Amsterdam, Ets Haim Library, EH 48 A 01, p. 27.

conversion as establishing common ground are the words of a Jew, not from Amsterdam but Leiden, who had “translated a number of devotional books” to instruct his English proselyte wife.¹⁰⁶ In 1641, this man stated to the visiting John Evelyn that the “Romans onely were the occasion of our Saviours death, whom he affirm’d (as the Turkes do) to be a greate Prophet but not the Messias.”¹⁰⁷ While Evelyn described the man’s words as a drunken diatribe against Christianity, they also served to ease his wife’s entrance into Judaism by removing two of the main obstacles for Jewish-Christianity, namely the Christian accusation that Jews were guilty of Jesus’ death and Jewish hostility for the figure of Jesus. The proselyte’s husband did so by shifting the blame for Jesus’ death from the Jews to the Romans and, even while denying Christ’s divinity, by offering the Muslim alternative that Jesus was a ‘great’ prophet.

While formal converts to Judaism and their Jewish relations sought to ease the proselyte’s entrance into Judaism by finding common ground between the two religions, others Judaized without formal conversion and so defied, by the very lack of official status to their Judaization, confessionalization. Some persisted in their Judaism despite being refused a formal conversion, such as the aforementioned Pieterszn, who declared to be prepared to die for his new faith even after his request for circumcision had been denied by the Jewish community – either of Amsterdam, Alkmaar or Haarlem.¹⁰⁸ In another case, from the end of the 1610s, Amsterdam’s Jewish leaders – the source does not reveal which of the three Sephardic congregations – convinced Christopher Sands of the English Judaizing Traskite community to commit to observing the Noahite laws rather than, as had been the purpose of his journey to Amsterdam, undergo formal conversion.¹⁰⁹

Of others there is no evidence that they tried to formally convert to Judaism, and they probably belonged to the group baptized by Kolakowski as *chrétiens sans église* (Christians without a church), Christians who were not *lieshebbers* but radically rejected church membership.¹¹⁰ Attracted to Judaism, they did not convert but joined the ranks of the Iberian “Jews without Judaism.” Such an attitude can for instance be found in the anger of Christian Kabbalists such as Knorr

¹⁰⁶ Kaplan, *Alternative Path...*, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁷ Idem, *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁸ Van der Haven, “Conversion on Trial...,” *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ Henry E. I. Phillips, “An Early Stuart Judaizing Sect,” *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)*, vol. 15, 1939, pp. 63-72, there: p. 70.

¹¹⁰ Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église...*, *op. cit.*

von Rosenroth and Van Helmont upon hearing that Johann Peter Spaeth had converted and become Moses Germanus, in 1696. His conversion represented to them, as Alison Coudert has written, “a failure of nerve and a retreat into the kind of divisive, combative religious particularism they worked tirelessly to overcome.”¹¹¹ To this category of Judaizers who did not convert probably also belonged the schoolmaster Aurelius Augustinus about whom Amsterdam’s church council in 1625 reported that he “keeps the Jewish Sabbath and slanders our Lord Jesus Christ in disgraceful ways.”¹¹²

To the most interesting category of Judaizing Christians belonged those who did not see adopting Jewish beliefs and practices as incommensurable with their church membership. In 1642 and 1643, Thomas Adams fought for an entire year to retain his church membership of Amsterdam’s English Reformed Church while at the same time unapologetically insisting on his “personal belief” that the Jewish rather than the Christian Sabbath should be observed. After the English Church’s Elders had not budged Adams even (unsuccessfully) appealed to the regional Reformed Classis to order his church to maintain him as a member.¹¹³ A similar case took place a year before, in 1641, when a member of Amsterdam’s Wallonian Reformed Church insisted that the Jewish Shabbat was never absolved and as a result observed both the Jewish and Christian Shabbats. The consistory threatened him with excommunication, to which the man responded that he would be glad to cease observing the Jewish Shabbath if they could convince him that God has abolished it.¹¹⁴ Another telling example from around the same time is that of Paulus the glassmaker, a member of Amsterdam’s Dutch Reformed Church. Neither his hostility to some of the core Christian doctrines nor his participation in synagogue services precluded for him being a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. On 8 March 1640, finally appearing after having been summoned several times, Paulus was officially accused of going “to the synagogue of the Jews, behaves there as a Jew,” and of slandering Jesus Christ, the Christian religion, and the Reformed Church “after the custom of the despicable Jews.”

¹¹¹ Allison P. Coudert, “Five Seventeenth-Century Christian Hebraists,” *Hebraica veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*. Ed. Idem and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 286-309, there: p. 287.

¹¹² “der Joden sabbath hout, ende onse Heere Jesum schandelyck lastert.” Roodenburg, *Onder censuur...*, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹¹³ Amsterdam, SA, English Reformed Church (318), Notulen (3), unnumbered (24 September, 8 and 22 October 1642; 3 March, 1 April, 8 July, 16 and 23 September 1643).

¹¹⁴ J. Tideman, “Een Waalsche sabbaths-vierder te Amsterdam in 1641,” *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen*, 1874, pp. 191-196.

Paulus responded by affirming most of the accusations (but denying these were slander) and, like the husband of the English proselyte in Leiden, by stating that Jesus Christ is not the savior “but merely a prophet.”¹¹⁵

Concluding

Jewish-Christianity among Amsterdam’s seventeenth-century conversos and the Dutch Christians who religiously gravitated toward Judaism was not the conscious building of bridges between ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity.’ Instead, it should be characterized as a counterculture against the confessionalization of Amsterdam’s converso community and that of the Dutch Christian churches in which religious pluralization and the homogenization and standardization of confessional institutions and communities went hand in hand. Only later in the century, when these confessional boundaries had clearly crystallized, Jewish-Christianity acquired that modern meaning, and eventually its existence in language.

In historical revisions such as that of this essay showing that modern taxonomies do not always apply to past behaviors, beliefs, and modes of being, one often senses a romantic desire for a more pristine past. This nostalgia, clearly detectable for example in Boyarin’s book, is for the primordial egalitarian chaos that existed before language, that crucial means of power, violently dismembered it and created taxonomies that gave their users a means to persecute, exclude, suppress, and discriminate. Should this nostalgic view also be applied to the Jewish-Christians of this essay, who practiced and believed in the axial moment of the Confessional Age in which in Western society confessional boundaries became strengthened? I do not think so. It cannot be truly argued that Jewish-Christianity suffered from this historical process of creating of religious difference. Those who were little interested in confessional boundaries were not increasingly worse off or dwindled in numbers when the century progressed. Instead, it seems the case that the nature of Jewish-Christianity changed (while picking up a name along the way) with the changes in society it was part of. Thus, earlier in the century, Fernandez, who had married Jansdr in 1610, thought to avoid losing the custody of his children to the Dutch Reformed Church by simply denying having

¹¹⁵ “hij ginck in de Sinagoge der Joden, dat hij hem in haere vergaderinge onder haer droeg als een Jode,” “na gewoonte van de lasterlycke Joden.” Amsterdam, SA, HG, Kerkeraad (7), p. 341 (see also: 196, 202, 206, 300, 301, and 339).

been aware of the religious difference between him and his deceased wife. At the end of the century, things were very different. Knorr von Rosenroth and Van Helmont's anger at Spaeth's conversion to Judaism in 1696, Oliger Paulli's desire to create a church uniting Christianity and Judaism that same year, and Sperling's inclusivist soteriology a decade before that, all were based on a clear recognition of the difference between Judaism and the different Christian denominations. Yet, as each of them showed, their recognition of this distinction was far from an insurmountable obstacle for their Jewish-Christianity.