EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 2: Jews and Urban Space, 2005, University of Maryland

Haag Jewish Community Minute Book

Stefan Litt, Bar Ilan University, Israel / Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria ,

ABSTRACT: The presented sources have been selected from the oldest minute book, the pinkas, of the Ashkenazi community in The Hague, which was kept from 1723 until 1786. The Hague was then the Dutch capital and residence of the Orange Stadholders. The city was much smaller than Amsterdam, but it was still one of the most important urban centers of the Dutch Republic. As the capital, its urban population included many officials, diplomats and soldiers, and these people formed and influenced the urban life significantly. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the high point of the Rococo with its intensive pursuit of amusement, evidenced by numerous theatres, operas, and pubs, as well as by people's colorful dresses and the soldiers' extraordinary uniforms.

This presentation is for the following text(s):

- Haag Jewish Community Minute Book

Stefan Litt

Bar Ilan University, Israel / Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria ,
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Introduction to Haag Jewish Community Minute Book

Stefan Litt, Bar Ilan University, Israel / Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria ,

Marching Soldiers, Opera Houses and Young Jewish Men in Eighteenth-Century Hague

The presented sources have been selected from the oldest minute book, the *pinkas*, of the Ashkenazi community in The Hague, which was kept from 1723 until 1786. The Hague was then the Dutch capital and residence of the Orange Stadholders. The city was much smaller than Amsterdam, but it was still one of the most important urban centers of the Dutch Republic. As the capital, its urban population included many officials, diplomats and soldiers, and these people formed and influenced the urban life significantly. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the high point of the Rococo with its intensive pursuit of amusement, evidenced by numerous theatres, operas, and pubs, as well as by people's colorful dresses and the soldiers' extraordinary uniforms.

All these opportunities for leisure activities attracted, of course, not only Christians, but also Jews. The visits of young male Jews at the Bosch, the military parade ground, on Saturdays were viewed suspiciously by the elders of the Jewish congregation. The leaders' attempts to control this phenomenon were based on the *halakhic* rules of the Sabbath. The Bosch was obviously situated outside the defined Sabbath-boundaries, and Jews couldn't walk there without breaking the law in case they carried objects with them. The *pinkas* presents the case of a young man, who was called several times before the leaders to explain his repeated walks to the Bosch on Sabbath, where he had been seen by others carrying a watch. The records, however, do not present the very end of the affair.

Another example for the participation of Jews in the secular, largely non-Jewish, urban life of The Hague is the common visits of the local opera house by the synagogue cantor, the *hazan*, and the synagogue reader, the *kore*. The leaders warned both of them that further visits would lead to the loss of their positions within the community.

The examples presented here illustrate the broad encounter between traditional Jewish life in the late eighteenth century and the world of the secular pleasures of the urban center of The Hague.

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Haag Jewish Community Minute Book
Pinkas, 1723-1798

Translated by Stefan Litt, Bar Ilan University, Israel / Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria ,

On *Shabbat Hagadol* 532, the wise head of the *beit din*, he may live, has insistently warned in his sermon that no one shall dare to walk on Shabbat to the Bosch. This is because one cannot be careful enough not to carry anything, and easily one can cause a desecration of the Shabbat as the Bible says, God forbid!

On Sunday, the day after Passover 532, the leaders, God may protect them, gathered in the house of the wise head of the *beit din*, he may live, and they summoned before them Michel Benjamin Haas. The leaders and the wise head of the *beit din*, he may live, have questioned him why he walked to the Bosch yesterday, on the holy Shabbat, carrying his watch with him, which fact is well known to the leaders. Why has he desecrated the Shabbat? In addition, didn't he hear the rabbi speaking about this when delivering his sermon on *Shabbat Hagadol*? He answered that he did it unintentionally, and that he was not attending the sermon on *Shabbat Hagadol*. He thought that one could carry a watch with him out of the place. Furthermore, he promised not to do so in future. The leaders, God may protect them, answered then that actually he was worth of being punished with the exclusion from the synagogue and with other additional kinds of punishment. Only because of his excuse that he did not know that, and because it happened for the first time, the leaders, God may protect them, have not punished him this time, and he has to beg for pardon for his sins with the wise head of the *beit din*, he may live.

The leaders, God may protect them, have made public the following announcement about this on Friday night in the synagogue (and the abovementioned Michel was present):

Some individuals did not abstain from going to the Bosch on last Holy Shabbat, and some of them have carried things from one place to the other, as they have admitted by themselves. This is, besides our many sins, a desecration of the Shabbat; and as

happened last year, when a great misdemeanour occurred that had never been seen in Israel before, when some people, sons of the devil, had seditiously and deceitfully left the area on the Holy Shabbat. [They did it] in order to go to the ground, where the soldiers drill, and to seeing them. They would have been worth for being punished publicly for being complete villains by excluding and expelling them. But [for this time] they only have been warned and have not been punished, because they have excused themselves with their ignorance.

Therefore, the leaders, God may protect them, and the wise head of the *beit din*, he may live, warn urgently that from this day on, no one, may it be man or woman, grown-up or young, shall dare to go to the Bosch on Shabbat, even when they do not carry anything with them, for not breaking the fence, God forbid! And whoever dares to go and break through the border, will be banned, excluded and expelled from the community of Israel, and he will be cursed forever. This is what those perpetrators deserve, who publicly desecrates the Shabbat.
Every listener may be blessed!

Entry No. 2:
On the first day of the month Iyar 532, minor reckoning, the leaders, God may protect them, gathered in the assembly room of the elders and before them came witnesses, Issac Shleeser and Wolf ben Menahem, both members of the community, and also Michel ben Anshel Bikten and testified that yesterday, on Holy Shabbat, they have seen Michel ben Benajmin Haas coming from the Bosch.

The leaders, God may protect them, have again called the above mentioned Michel, who, until now, has not yet come to hear the sentence of the leaders. His mother, Hena, wife of Benjamin Haas, has come and said that her son, mentioned above, had been to the Bosch, but he had not carried anything with him. She urgently asked the leaders, God may protect them, not to sentence her son Michel, mentioned above, in absence, and she promised that he will appear before the leaders.

Fol. 244. Entry No. 3
The leaders, God may protect them, considered to be good to tell the *hasan*, R. Matatjahu, and the *kore*, R. Benjamin, not to dare to go to any kind of comedy or opera from today on. In case they would violate the prohibition, by daring to go together or any of them to comedies or to the opera, they will be excluded from their offices for six weeks for the first time. During that time they will not be allowed to do any service. For the second time, they will be relieved from their offices completely. Each of them will get a copy of this decision from the *shammash*, in order to comply with these instructions. Here, Hague, Sunday, Tammuz 6, 539, minor reckoning. The vain Itzik Leiden, scribe of

the community

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Fol. 219 v., entry No.1:

שבת הגדול תקלב הוט הגא"בד ש' בדרשה שלו שטארק מזהיר גוועזן דש קיינר זיך דר וועגן זול בשבת אין בוש צו גיהן, ווילן מען זיך ניט גנוגן פאר זעהן קאן דש מען ניקש בייא זיך טרוגן זול ובנקל מון קען קומן חלילה לכדי חילול שבת דאורייתא

יום א אסרו חג דפסח תקלב זיין קהל יצ' פר גאדרט בבית הגאב"ד ש' הוט מון לוזן רופן אן מיכל בנימן הז, הבן איהם קהל יצ' בצירוף הגא"בד ש' גפראגט ווילין מון גאנץ וואוהל ווישט, ער ביום אתמול בשבת קודש אין בוש איזט גוועזן אונד בייא זיך גטראגן זיין אורלושי ווארום ער מחלל שבת הוט גוועזן, אויב ער שבת הגדול ניט גהערט הוט דער רבי דא פון דרשנן, והשיב זולכש בשוגג גטאהן צו האבן דש ער שבת הגדול ניט צו דיא דרשה איזט גוועזן, ער הוט גמיינט איין אורלאשי מעג מען וואוהל ביי זיך טראגן חוץ למקום, אונד פר שפראכן זולכש ניט ווידר צו טוהן וואו אויף קהל יצ' איהם גזאגט הבן דש ער ראוי ונכון וועהר גשטראפיט צו ווערן איהם ניט שולין צו לאזן וכהנה רבים שארי עונשין, אך ורק ווילין ער זיך עקסקוזיהרט דש זולכש ניט גווישט הוט אונ ווילין עש ערשטי מאהל איזט, איהם קהל יצ' דיזיש מאהל ניט ווערדן מענש זיין אונ ער אצל הגא"בד ש' זול מקבל תשובה זיין על חטאיו

ע"ז הבן קהל יצ' פרייטאג צו נאכט פולגנדי כרוז בבה"כ לוזן פובליציהרן (אונ מיכל הנ"ל שולין גוועזן)

מאחר בשבת שעברה זיך לייטן ניט ענטזעהין הבן, אום בשבת קודש אין בוש צו גיהן וקצתן הבן גטראגן מרשות לרשות, כמו זיא זעלבשטן הען מודה גוועזן וועלכש בעו"ה איין חילול שבת גמור איזט, וכמו כן בשנה העבר איזט פרצה גדולה דלא יעשה בישראל גשעהן שיצאו אנשים בני בליעל, במרד ובעל מחוץ לתחום בשבת קודש, אויף זולביגי פלאץ וואו דיא עקסערציציע מבעלי מלחמות גשעהן אום זעלביגש צו צו זעהן, אונד וועהר ראוי ונכון גוועזן זעלביגי לייטן מפרסים ברבים צו זיין פר רשעים גמורים אונד זיא מחרים ומנדה צו זיין רק אין עונשין אלא מזהירין, ובפרט דש זיך עקסקוזיהרט הבן בחסרון ידיעתם

בכן זיין קהל יצ' בצרוף הגאון אב"ד ש' מזהיר באזהרה גדולה דש קיינר הן איש הן אישה מגדול ועד קטן זיך דר וועגן זול מהיום והלאה בשבת אין בוש צו געהן אויב שוין זיא ניקש בייא זיך טראגן כדי שלא לפרוץ הגדר ח"ו ומי שיערב לבו לגשת ולעבור על הגבול ווערט מען דעם זעלביגן מחרים ומנדה ומפריש מקהל ישראל זיין שיהי' בכלל ארור אשר לא יקים, וויא זולכי עוברי עבירה צו קומן דיא מחלל שבת בפרהסיא זיינלכל השומע תבוא עליו ברכה

entry No. 2:

יום א' דר"ח אייר תקלב ל' זיינן קהל יצ' פר גאדירט בחדר הקהל ובאו עדות לפני קהל יצ' ה"ה אייזק שליזר אונ וואלף בן מנחם ב"ב אונ מיכל ב' אנשיל ביקטן והעידו, דש זיא ביום אתמול בשבת קודש הבן זעהן אויז עש בוש ארויז קומן אן מיכל בן בנימן הז

קהל יצ' הבן מיכל הנ"ל ווידר לוזן רופן וועלכר עד הנה נאך ניט לפס[ק] קהל קומן אמו הענא אשת בנימן הז איזט קומן אונד גזאגט בנה הנ"ל איזט אין בוש גוועזן אבר הוט ניקש בייא זיך גטראגן אונד שטארק אן גהאלטן אצל קהל יצ' דש מען קיין פסק על בנה מיכל הנ"ל מאכן זול שלא בפניו, זיא פר שפרעכט דש ער זיך פר קהל שטעללין ווערט

Fol. 244, entry No. 3

קהל יצ' הבן גוט גפונדן להחזן ר' מתתי' ולהקורא ר' בנימן היא מיט אן צו זאגן דש זיא זיך מהיום והלאה ניט אונטר שטיהן זוללין אין אייניגה קומעדיע או opera צו גיהן, ובאם שיעברו על זה, זיא אודר איינר מהם זיך אונטרשטין זעלט אין קומעדיע או opera צו גיהן פר פעם ראשון 6 וואוכן משירות שלו דעפורטירט זיין משך אותו זמן קיין שירות צו גניסן ובפעם שנית פון אירה אופיסיע פעליג דעפורטיהרט ווערן, מזה זול מען יעדרם העתקה ע"י השמש איבר ליוורט ווערן אום זיך נאך צו רעגוליהרן נעשה בחדר הקהל פה האג יום א ו תמוז תקלט לפ"ק

הק' איצק ליידן נה"ק

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