



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Aspecten van Joods leven in Roermond en Midden-Limburg 1275-2018

Bruggen, H.J.J.M. van der

### Citation

Bruggen, H. J. J. M. van der. (2021, October 28). *Aspecten van Joods leven in Roermond en Midden-Limburg 1275-2018*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3225483>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3225483>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## SUMMARY

This micro-history of Jewish life in Roermond and Middle-Limburg is simultaneously European history. One reason for this is that in the course of time many European peoples or nations played a role in Roermond and its surrounding area. Yet it is also important to note that for centuries similar processes of acceptance and distancing with respect to Jews have occurred in many places in Europe.

The central question of this study is: how did the attitude of the environment, strongly determined by Christianity, affect the position and status of the Jews in Roermond and Middle Limburg, from the late Middle Ages to the early twenty-first century? Because the Middle-Limburg region has throughout the centuries been predominantly Roman-Catholic, one of the main questions in this dissertation concerns the attitude of the Catholic Church as an institution over the course of time – and not only during the years 1940-1945 –, and the concomitant attitude of the Catholic press.

The developments involved necessitate us to address fundamental issues such as the relation between religion and society, and its importance for the status and position of minorities. Additionally, there are important questions concerning the geographical context of Roermond as a constant factor, the succession of strongly differing administrations, the urban community, the fluctuating presence of Jews and their contacts with non-Jews, and the importance of trade. For the Jews of Roermond and surroundings, Christian anti-Judaism has also been an important factor. The feelings it evoked were often negative and at times even outright hostile towards Jews. Other questions regard the degree of pillarization, the make-up of the Jewish community and the extent of assimilation. Regarding the Second World War, the roles played by the Catholic Church and by local authorities and police in those years are also subject to critical examination. This is one of the reasons that in this study of 750 years of Jewish life a diachronic perspective has been used, which can offer insight into the continuity and discontinuity of Jewish presence and the attitudes of the environment.

In order to offer clear demarcations between the relevant periods in this history the dissertation has been structured as outlined below.

After an extensive Introduction, Part I, consisting of two chapters, discusses the vicissitudes of the Jews from their first arrival in Roermond en Middle-Limburg until the late eighteenth century. Because of the lack of sources the perspective of Part I is necessarily global, and rather fragmentary. The

question raised concerns the degree to which Jews constituted a marginal, outsider group until 1796.

Part II opens with the long French occupation and ends with the early twenty-first century. It is divided into five chapters covering five separate periods:

1. The granting of civic equality to Jews, and the hesitant start of their emancipation, from the beginning of French rule in 1794-1796 through to the restoration of the North-Netherlands administration;
2. The initially covert and later definitive restoration of the Catholic episcopal hierarchy in 1840 and 1853, respectively, until the end of the First World War (1840-1918);
3. The Interbellum (1918-1940);
4. The period of the Second World War (1940-1945);
5. The post-war period (1945-2018).

Part II is followed by some final observations.

The Introduction concerns such topics as the internal diversity of the Catholic and Jewish communities, the continuity of the underlying mindsets throughout the centuries, and important concepts such as anti-Judaism, antisemitism and antizionism. This involves a discussion of the parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity, defined as “secession friction”, and the Catholic dogma of supersessionism. The relationship between the attitude and teachings of the Catholic Church and antisemitism are discussed with reference to the views of a number of authors. The crucial question is whether antisemitism is endemic in Catholicism. Finally, the importance of the correspondence between religious dominance and empathic behavior as a factor determining the attitude towards minorities such as the Jews is addressed.

In Chapter I.1 attention is paid to the position of the Jews in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Restrictive measures against the Jews had already been issued by the third (1179) and fourth (1215) Lateran Councils before they were able to settle in Roermond. Of the Jews that may have had links with Roermond in the thirteenth century we rarely know more than their names and their addresses in Cologne.

In the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the presence of Jewish settlements in Roermond can be clearly shown. Interruptions in residences and simultaneous expulsions elsewhere indicate that persecutions and

banishments were regular occurrences – in which the dukes of Guelder at times seem to have actively participated. The anti-Judaist imagery in one of the oldest paintings in Dutch history – the *Passietafel* (Scenes from the Life of Christ), dating from around 1430 and probably made in Roermond – clearly illustrates the feelings citizens harboured against Jews.

After the middle of the sixteenth century, the city, which by then had become part of the Spanish Netherlands, did not have any Jewish inhabitants for centuries. After the Spanish general Alva had forbidden Jews to live in the dukedom of Guelder, information about Jews became scarce. In the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period the Jews in Roermond and Middle-Limburg made no lasting name for themselves, aside from the bad reputation imputed to them in the course of time.

In Chapter I.2 developments in the eighteenth century are discussed. During that time commercial dealings with the Jews became more intensive, partly because of the influence of the Northern Netherlands. However, this met with resistance in the Southern (since 1713 Austrian) Netherlands. The cities, Brussels foremost but also the much smaller Roermond, protested vehemently against the presence of Jews and the more liberal concessions. In their aversion against Jews the first Austrian rulers, Charles VI and Maria Theresia, set an example to their subjects, in spite of their dependence on Jewish bankers for the funding of their war efforts.

The next Austrian ruler, Joseph II, proved to have a more modern outlook and wanted equal treatment for all his subjects. In Roermond there was great enthusiasm for the ideals of the Enlightenment, even among priests. However, the uncompromising behaviour of Joseph II, the clinging to power on the part of the authorities in the Catholic Church, and the fear of a change such as foreshadowed in France at that moment, led to conservative rigidity. In spite of their exalted and enlightened ideals the members of the Guelder Court, residing in Roermond, did not have the courage to advise the national government to admit Jews.

The Enlightenment certainly had a noticeable influence in Middle-Limburg in the eighteenth century, but if we take into account the attitudes towards Jews we have to conclude its impact was limited in scope. In spite of their pursuit of tolerance and equality, even Enlightenment protagonists such as Voltaire contributed to the demonization of Jews – thus conforming to a European tradition.

The first chapter of Part II starts with the French Revolution and the conquest of the Southern Netherlands. It is thanks to these events that Jews were granted civic equality in the nine Southern departments that were added to France in 1795. Subsequently, the Jewish population rapidly increased in the south of the Limburg region, but not in Roermond – the city was not very attractive because of the initially poor economic situation. A permanent Jewish settlement in the city did not materialize until Roermond's incorporation into the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815. The changing regimes following the French period are described in this short chapter, in which the small Jewish settlement in the village of Linne, close to Roermond on the Meuse, is also mentioned.

The opening of chapter II.2 sketches how in the nineteenth century the growth of the Jewish population was stimulated by the rise of extensive paper and textile industries. The civic equality attracted many Jews from border regions that had become Prussian; they did not want a return to the old situation and sought refuge in the Netherlands. The rapidly growing economy and increasing prosperity in Roermond in the first three-quarters of the century were also consequential for the local Jews. They formed an independent community with its own synagogue, a cemetery, and clergy.

Catholics, Protestants and Jews in Roermond each had their 'pillar' with their own institutions. The Jewish community could not afford extensive organisations of its own, but did have institutions for charity and for specific needs and purposes. At the same time the Jews in Roermond experienced a process of rapprochement and integration in the urban community.

Meanwhile, in the nineteenth century the influence of the Catholic Church was increasing once again. After the creation of the vicariate of Roermond in 1840 (which encompassed the entire province of Limburg) and the appointment of a bishop, the Church regained the position of power it had enjoyed prior to the French Revolution, thereby arrogating virtually all education, usurping control over most newspapers in Limburg, and steadily gaining influence in politics.

In the later diocese of Roermond anti-Judaism regularly degenerated into antisemitism. The diocese strictly followed the line of the Vatican press and other Catholic periodicals in Italy: articles on alleged ritual killings were always reproduced in the Roermond Catholic press. Because at that time readers almost always derived their news from only one, usually church-related, newspaper the consequences must have been serious. These publications often seemed determined efforts to dehumanize 'the Jew', and in this way foreshadowed the disaster of the persecution and destruction during the years 1940-1945. In

section II.2.4 the gravity and scope of these expressions of antisemitism are illustrated by way of multiple quotations from the periodical press.

In numerous countries during the nineteenth century religious antisemitism entered into a toxic marriage with nationalist movements. Everywhere, nation building caused a quest for a country's self-identity – in which Jews did not fit. The most notorious examples are the *Hepp-Hepp Krawalle* in the German states, the Dreyfus affair in France, and the nationalism of the warring countries during the First World War.

A reflection of the increased power of the Catholic Church in Roermond in those years is the global coincidence of the dividing lines in the city with the raging local strife between clericals and liberals (or, better, between ultramontane and enlightened groups). The significance of integralism, which may be qualified as a form of religious reactionary conservatism and which emerged within the Catholic Church around 1900, should not be underestimated, as explained in section II.3.5. From there it was but a short step to the fascism that arose after the First World War. Significantly, a number of integralists later openly called themselves fascists or national socialists.

The 1914-1918 war paved the way for the next world war and the Shoah. Jews were often the victims of war actions in Eastern Europe, and on both sides of the front lines Jewish countrymen joining in the fighting were mistrusted. Generals and politicians in Germany seized their chance to blame the Jews for the lost war. For Jews, the 1917 Balfour declaration was crucially important, even though opinions in the Netherlands were divided about its worth. This also applied to the Jews in Roermond. They had already joined the *Joodsch Volkspetitionnement* (General Jewish Petition) earlier on in that same year; this was an appeal from all Dutch Jewish parties to the government to promote a solution to the 'Jewish Question' at the upcoming Peace Conference after the war.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the resistance against Catholic antisemitism on the part of Catholic leaders in the Northern Netherlands, such as Schaepman and Aalberse, was of great importance. In the diocese of Roermond, too, the partly church-inspired hatred against the Jews was diminishing. An important figure in the city in this respect was Henri Poels, a priest, biblical scholar and almoner for social work who spoke up for the Jews. Also essential was the resistance within the diocese at the time of the rise of National Socialism and antisemitism in the nineteen-thirties.

It goes without saying that ‘integration’ does not mean that anti-Jewish feelings disappear from society – a truth made very clear in the novels and other publications by the Roermond-born Jewish author Jacob Hiegentlich. Still, Max Behretz's participation in the city council elections as chairman of the SDAP in 1939 constituted a big step forward. In the period just before World War II there was also growing integration in sports organisations and citywide activities.

The extent to which the increasing integration of Jews in Roermond society could go together with anti-Jewish sentiments is also reflected in the far-reaching involvement of some members of the local, originally liberal group with radical right-wing parties and their undemocratic principles, among which antisemitism, from 1920 onwards.

In sections II.4.1-21 the occupation and the resulting relentless destruction of the Jews in the Shoah are described: the first victims; the first protocols that limited the independence of the Roermond Jews; and the shameless plundering. Further topics are the three subtly planned deportations, and the fate of some of the families and the liquidations of their assets. The tragedies of Jews escaping into hiding are depicted.

The quality of civil administration, crucial for the position of the Jews, is also analysed, with the conclusion that during the occupation local government in Roermond was weak. Mayor Paul Reymer's leadership at that time was less than admirable: he had no scruples about collaborating closely with the Germans. This must have had a demoralising effect, and it must be one of the explanations for the relatively low survival rate among the Jews. The assistance of the local police in the deportations also played an important part. Unlike the preceding chapters, this chapter does not end with a conclusion, but with lists of all those who did not survive the persecutions.

Sections II.5.1-5 focus on three specific aspects of the war and the Shoah. First of all, there is the exceptional and heroic stance of the Catholic Church in Limburg, which offered vigorous resistance at the cost of many victims amongst its priests. Secondly, there are the problems involved with the Jews in hiding. In the third section of the chapter an attempt is made to account for the differences in chances of survival between some four Limburg border towns. Section II.5.4 contains a comparison with three cities in the North Netherlands: Groningen, Enschede and Hengelo.

The final years of the Jewish community in Roermond are described in chapter II.6. After 1945 the Roermond Jews initially managed to restore as much as possible of their religious life. The rebuilding of their synagogue was a

remarkable achievement in those post-war years. Hardly any other Jewish community in Limburg had managed to maintain or revive the synagogue. However, the battering inflicted on the Jews of Roermond through the 1940-1945 persecutions has proved fatal. We have to conclude that in 2021 a future for Jewish life in Roermond and Middle-Limburg is highly unlikely.

