



CASTRO NEWSLETTER

Castro Newsletter published by the David Henriques de Castrofonds, Kerkstraat 7, 1191 JB Ouderkerk a/d Amstel
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BETH HAIM MAINTENANCE AT RISK

The economic crisis is also biting Beth Haim. Fewer donations are being received and there is a threat that the annual municipal subsidies will be completely withdrawn. This means that less maintenance will be possible. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep the national monument open to the public. In September of this year, the board of directors had to temporarily halt maintenance work completely owing to a lack of financial resources.

Expensive, expert maintenance is needed to keep the 4-hectare cemetery open. In order to give some idea of the funds needed:

- To mow the cemetery once costs approx. €5,000.
- To trim the hedges costs approx. €2,500
- To maintain and prune the trees once costs approx. €2,700.

Because it is insufficient to do all of this only once a year, the annual maintenance budget amounts to more than €30,000. And this certainly does not include the specific maintenance of the beautiful marble tombstones.

Partly thanks to the new Beth Haim website, there is growing interest in guided tours from both the Netherlands and abroad. Hopefully this will lead to new donors because there is a large shortfall on the maintenance budget for 2011.

In this newsletter, we would also like to appeal to our regular donors to contribute to one of the most essential maintenance tasks at Beth Haim: maintaining the gardens. In fact, if maintenance falls behind, visitors can no longer access the cemetery.

The cemetery occupies an area of about 10 acres and dates from 1614. It is open to the public. The entrance is next to the Vegahuis - the caretaker's house (1883) in Kerkstraat. The Rodeamentoshuis or House of Processions (1705) is situated in the cemetery close to the water-gate on the Bullewijk.



WEBSITE WWW.BETHHAIM.NL

If you have missed a newsletter, or would simply like to travel back in time, we have the perfect solution! From the website, you can download the entire collection of newsletters from 1998, each of which contains interesting historical facts.

On the new website, you can also view a number of beautiful pictures of the magnificent marble tombstones. You can order books and even arrange a guided tour. Come and visit us!

Beth Haim on the right of the Bullewijk in about 1946



WWW.BETHHAIM.NL – bethhaim@gmail.com

WE URGENTLY NEED FUNDS Help Preserve Beth Haim! ING 69 34 112

A GUIDED TOUR OF BETH HAIM

Many people visited Beth Haim on the annual Heritage Day on 12 September 2010 and a number of guides were on hand to conduct hourly guided tours. Once again, we received a lot of enthusiastic reactions and beautiful photographs. The next open day will be held to mark the Amstellanddag on 5 June 2011.

But, of course, you don't need to wait until the open days. You can plan a visit or guided tour the whole year round. See our website for the opening hours. Beth Haim is closed to the public on Saturdays and Jewish festivals.

The David Henriques de Castro Fund would like to invite you to visit this unique cemetery in Ouderkerk. In addition to the caretaker, Dennis Ouderkerk, there are a number of expert guides to show you around. The caretaker will ensure that your visit is conducted properly and according to your wishes. He will coordinate your visit. We ask you to inform



us in advance of all guided tours so that we can prepare for your visit.

A normal guided tour takes about 50 minutes. In rainy weather, it can be muddy so we advise you to bring suitable footwear. If you have difficulty walking, please contact us so that we can take this into account. You are allowed to film and take photographs at the cemetery but these must not be used for commercial ends. If

you would like to share your best photos with others, please send them to us so that we can add them to our photo gallery on the website.

We would request you to draw the attention of visitors to the rules of behaviour shown on the notice board at the entrance to the cemetery.

If there is a burial taking place at the same time as your visit is scheduled, we regret to say that we will have to cancel your reservation. The caretaker will contact you immediately to make a new appointment. For this reason, it is important that we have your contact information.

We hope that you will enjoy the guided tour and we would like to know whether everything went as you wished.

DIKE IMPROVEMENT



A drawing from 1885 showing small trees (pollard willows) on the banks of the Bullewijk.

On 15 September 2010, Waternet started with dike improvement. This is part of the Holendrechteweg/Koningin Julianalaan dike improvement project.

In view of the historical and cultural value of Beth Haim, the board of directors of the Castro Fund was closely involved in

drawing up the plans. A large number of trees will have to be felled but a replanting plan has been agreed upon. The result will be a safe dike and Beth Haim's green and historical character will be preserved.

Work on this project will have to be carried out from the water. For religious reasons, the graves in the cemetery and the

surrounding ground must not be troubled by the work. Materials will be transported to and fro over the water under the Kerkbrug. This means that river traffic and bridge opening will continue after the recreational sailing season.

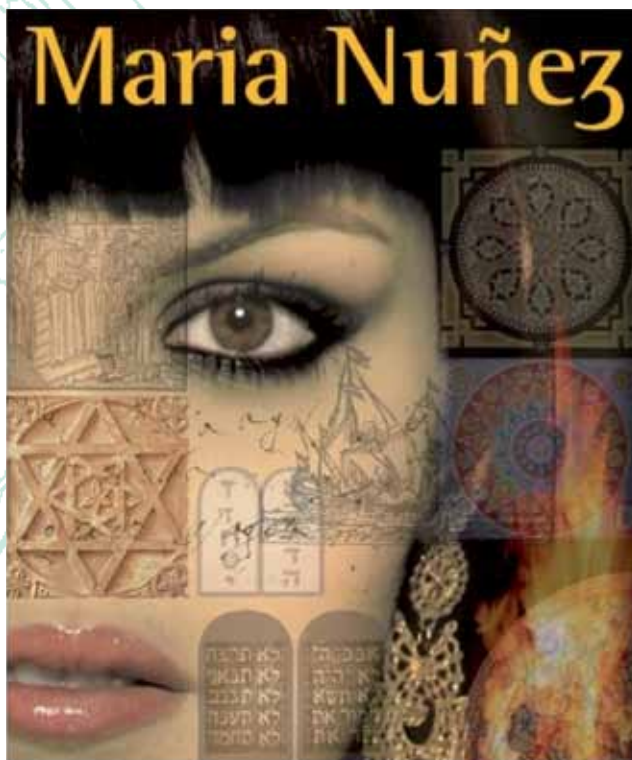
It's expected that the work will be complete at the beginning of 2011. Waternet is carrying out the work on behalf of the Amstel, Gooi and Vecht Water Board. If you have any questions, please address them to the project team, tel. 0900-9394. For more information about the project, you can view the presentation that Waternet showed to local residents in July on our website.

MARIA NUÑEZ, by Frans Lavell

Sara Abendana, tell us something about your daughter Maria Nuñez....

Sara, I discovered you at Beth Haim, while I was actually looking for your daughter Maria Nuñez. Dennis Ouderdorp, the caretaker, saw the look of disappointment on me as I searched and asked me whose stone I was looking for. "Maria Nuñez, the first Jewess in Amsterdam," I said, with a certain pride in my newly acquired knowledge of the history of 'Mokum'. I saw from his raised eyebrows that he probably would have liked to dispute the bit about "first", but he didn't pursue the matter. "Maria isn't buried here," he said. "But her mother is!" And then he took me to your grave. In the books you're called Mayor Rodriguez and yet there was inscribed, weather-beaten yet clearly, Sara Abendana. "Is that really Maria's mother?" I asked, in disbelief. "Surely she was called..." "Yes, it is," said Dennis. "But soon after she arrived in Amsterdam she had her name changed from her Portuguese Catholic name to the Jewish name Sara Abendana".

Dear Sara, that must have been a lonely decision. Because when your husband arrived in Amsterdam from Brazil, he didn't follow your example – he remained a Christian and is buried in the Nieuwe Kerk. And what about your daughter Maria? What about your pride, your hope, who you scrubbed clean at home after she had been christened Maria in the cathedral, and named her Esther? She continued to call herself Maria Nuñez and never publicly converted to Judaism. Yet she rejected the offers of Queen Elisabeth and all those English nobles in order to remain a free Jewess in Amsterdam. Sara, did she perhaps fall out with the rabbis from the East? Could she stand no more coercion and prohibitions after escaping from the tyranny of the Portuguese Inquisition? You know how rebellious she was in Portugal. She endangered the entire family and you ended up in prison. Sara, I think you had a lot of criticisms for your daughter. Most of all when and her husband left for Seville during the Twelve Years' Truce between Spain and the Dutch republic. But Sara, you have a right to be proud of Maria, your Esther. Throughout the world she is regarded as a heroine, as a founder of the Jerusalem of the North. The Dutch have rather forgotten that. The Second World War has cast a shadow over her.



But, I promise you Sara, we will restore her to her place of honour. Her warning against fundamentalism and intolerance is now more topical than ever.

When Maria Nuñez set foot on the quayside in Amsterdam in 1597, after an adventurous journey, there was not yet a single Jew living in the city. Fifty years later, it was the most flourishing Jewish community in the world. If we are to believe the historian Daniel Levi de Barrios (also buried at Beth Haim), Amsterdam would never have become "Mokum" if Maria had said "yes" to the nobleman who captured her ship and asked her to marry him. But she said "no" to wealth and power in England because there too it was forbidden to be a Jew. She wanted freedom of religion and the only place that offered that at the time was Amsterdam. But Amsterdam had a lot more to offer than just freedom of belief. At that time, the city was developing into the most powerful trading centre in the world and could put Portuguese and Spanish-speaking traders with contacts in Asia, South America, Morocco and Turkey to good use.

"Here you can be a Jew without fear and make a good living" must have been roughly the message that Maria sent to the "Catholic" Jews in Spain and Portugal. Did Maria Nuñez inspire us alone? No, we

are not the first to draw inspiration from Maria Nuñez. The Jewish writer Siegfried van Praag (1899–2002), who was popular before the Second World War, wrote a novella entitled "Maria Nunes". And in 1934 – remarkably only one year before Hitler seized power – "Maria Nunnez, Eine Jüdische Überlieferung" was published in Berlin, written by the Jewish journalist Hermann Sinsheimer who had fled to Great Britain. (The town of his birth, Freinsheim, has a street named after him and honours him with a biennial prize for literature.) And recently we discovered that Mark Feldman, the American violinist well-known on the jazz circuit, includes a piece called Maria Nuñez in his repertoire. He was amazed to find that Dutch audiences did not know the history of Maria and told the story during one of his concerts. That story, as De Barrios recounted it, is actually very summary. It does not say what happened before her flight. Or why her father and mother did not go too. And what did she experience in London? How was she received in Amsterdam? These are all gaps in the story that a writer can fill with his imagination. Or, as Hermann Sinsheimer wrote: "Perhaps it didn't happen that way, but it could have happened that way!"

In a competition for musical scripts held by Theaters Tilburg, Hogeschool Fontys and Productiehuis Muziektheater, Maria Nuñez was chosen from fifty submissions as the most promising for large-scale theatre performance. The selection committee, which consisted of five producers and fourteen theatre directors, judged Maria Nuñez on story structure, character development, clarity of plot, coherence, plausibility, and, of course, audience attractiveness.

'Perhaps your piece will be on the stage in the autumn of 2007' the winner was promised. So too would be a showcase by the students at Fontys. Unfortunately this has not yet happened but we are still working on it. For more information, see www.marianunez-musical.com

Frans Lavell
Artistic leader, Muziektheater Maria Nuñez

THE JEWISH PAST OF THE VECHTSTREEK, SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2010, WWW.MUSEUMMAARSSSEN.NL

The Jewish past of the Vechtstreek – the area bordering the Vecht river – is a relatively unknown chapter in history. Museum Maarsssen is throwing light on this chapter with its new exhibition *Sporen uit de mediene. Joods verleden van de Vechtstreek* (In the tracks of the *Mediene*. The Jewish past of the Vechtstreek).



Biema and Aron ha-Kodesj (Lectern and Holy Ark) from the Ashkenazic Synagogue in Maarsssen, now in the Ashkenazic Synagogue in Utrecht). 2010.

The first Jews settled in in the Vechtstreek, in Maarsssen and Maarsseveen, after 1650. They either left Amsterdam (Mokum) in search of other ways of supporting themselves 'in the provinces' (the *mediene*) or they lived there on a country estate, mostly in the summer. They were Sephardic (Spanish-Portuguese) Jews, many of them wealthy and influential merchants, bankers and scholars from Amsterdam and The Hague. They constituted a notable community.

At the beginning of the 18th century, they were joined by Ashkenazi Jews. These people fled to the Netherlands from Eastern Europe, as a result of persecution. They were usually poor.

Ashkenazic (Hoogduitse) synagogue in Maarsssen, ca. 1700

They first practised their religion in home

synagogues, despite opposition from the Christian church council and the States of Utrecht. Later they established a Portuguese Jewish synagogue in Maarsssen (1720) and a Ashkenazic synagogue in Maarsseveen (1758). There was also a Jewish community with a (home) synagogue in Vreeland and Weesp.

There was a flourishing Jewish community for almost two centuries, mostly in Maarsssen and Maarsseveen. Various (home) synagogues and a Jewish cemetery testify to this.

Until 1796, Jews did not have full civil rights. Almost nowhere were they permitted to practise a craft or own land. In conservative Utrecht, they were allowed to engage in trade and to study but they were not permitted to live there. The city of Utrecht finally opened its gates to them in 1798. Many people then left Maarsssen. During the economic recession, many Portuguese Jews returned to Amsterdam in poverty. The two synagogues were demolished in 1836 and 1927. The 19th and 20th centuries saw a slow process of acceptance and partial assimilation for the Jewish community. During the Nazi terror of 1940-1945, the community was decimated, and the Vechtstreek was no exception.

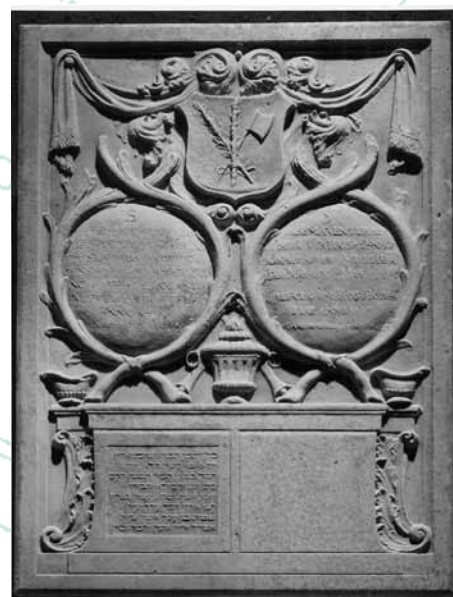
MACHADO (Don Antonio Alvares, alias Mosje or Mozes), married to Rachel Machado, belonged to an important Portuguese-Jewish family that also has a branch in the West Indies. Mozes Machado, alias Antonio Alvares Machado, was one of the leading purveyors to the court of Stadholder Willem III, who had an estate in Maarsssen aan de Vecht.

Don Antonio was a 'Coopman', or merchant, of Amsterdam and later lived in an elegant hotel in The Hague. A special friend of the king/stadholder Willem III, he performed many important services, mostly in Flanders, as '*Provediteur-General* to the army of the State'. On several occasions, this wealthy provediteur advanced millions of guilders to the Council of State. He displayed great skill in military matters. He was one of the 'exceptionally good friends' of Willem III, to whom he owed a lot. He owned 'Hogevecht' in

Maarsssen and in 1694 bought the beautiful and very expensive '(Vecht)Oever' there, where he spent the summer. When he freed 120 people at the battle of Reinbach, he was honoured by being presented with the large, valuable Amsterdam folio edition of Maimonides' religious codex *Yad ha-Chazaka*.

He died in 1697, his wife 19 years later. Both are buried in the Portuguese-Jewish cemetery Beth Haim in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel under an extraordinarily beautiful, still-intact monument. The monument bears the arms of the Machados – the axe – and an inscription in Portuguese describing his office in the armies of England and the Republic, while an inscription in Hebrew mentions his well-spent life and the ransoming of prisoners at Reinbach. The monument, which had subsided, was restored by D. Henriques de Castro Mzn.

The book *Sporen uit de Mediene. Joods verleden van de Vechtstreek* can be ordered from the Museum for 3 euros. For more information about the exhibition, see www.museummaarsssen.nl



Headstone of Mozes Machado, alias Don Antonio Alvares and his wife Rachel Machado - Ximenes Cardozo.

GRAVESTONE OF THE ABENDANA FAMILY

In the book "Keur van Grafstenen" (which can be ordered for €75.00 on www.beth-haim.nl), archaeologist David Henriques de Castro describes some extraordinary memorial stones. Two of these concern the Abendana family: Sara Abendana, alias Dona Mayor Rodriguez and David Abendana, alias Francisco Nunes (Pereyra) Homem.

By consulting the Livro de Beth Haim, the archaeologist was able to link the aliases definitely with the names he found on the gravestones. The entries in the burial register were as follows: "died, (Sara) the mother of Justa Pereyra, who was the mother-in-law of Francisco Nunes Homem, buried in Row 7, grave (number)25". Then: "In Row 7, in grave 25 was buried (Sara) the mother of Antonio Lopes Pereyra, who was the mother-in-law of Francisco Nuñez Homem".

The book does not contain photos of the tombstones as included in this newsletter.



Gravestone of Sara Abendana, alias Dona Mayor Rodriguez (mother of Maria Nuñez).

This is probably because the memorial stones are very modest. However, the archaeologist does record the inscriptions for cultural-historical reasons:

"S(epultur)a de Sara Abendana Q(ue) se apegov con el Dio em 3 Teseri 5385", Which translates as follows: Grave of Sara Abendana, who went to G'd on the 3rd Tishrei 5385 (16 Sept. 1624).

Gravestone of Sara Abendana, alias Dona Mayor Rodriguez (mother of Maria Nuñez). There is a Hebrew inscription that reads:

"And David slept with his fathers and was placed in the grave that had been dug for him (and) provided with this memorial stone. He is the noble, worthy David Abendana – he rests in (the Garden of) Eden – who died on the anniversary of Moses' death, the 7th Adar I (first month of Adar), 5385 (14 Feb. 1625)".

On the gravestone on the left (see photo), De Castro could still read the letters A and, further on, L, and, based on the custom of burying husband and wife next to each other, he states that one should assume that Abigael (Justa) is buried there.

Gravestone of David Abendana, alias Francisco Nunes (Pereyra) Homem

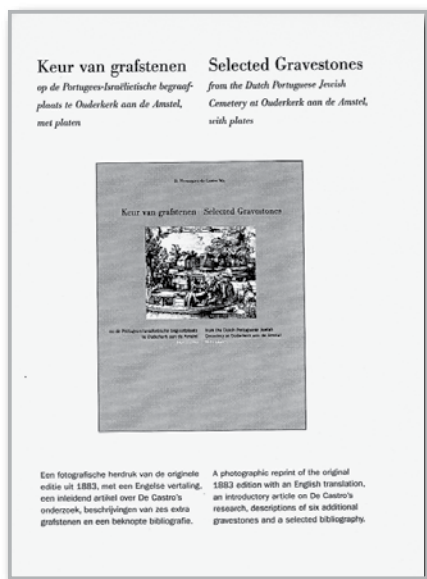
According to the burial register, David Abendana is buried next to Dona Sara Altaide. This grave should therefore be on the right. This is unusual as the wife was normally buried on the right side of her husband but elsewhere at Beth Haim one finds that they tended to keep to the left sometimes. On Jewish tombstones it is not unusual to state the date of death if this is in some way remarkable. Here too the date of death, 7 Adar, is linked to the date of death of the prophet Moses, who, according to sources, died on 7 Adar.

De Castro also briefly summarises the story of the Abendana family and the related story of Maria Nuñez, to which he also devotes attention in his introduction.

Finally it is stated that Manuel Abendana is a descendant of the marriage between David and Abigael Abendana.

BOOKS ABOUT BETH HAIM CEMETERY

Selected Gravestones -- Keur van Grafstenen by David Henriques de Castro.



A photographic reprint of the original 1883 edition with an English translation, an introductory article on De Castro's research, descriptions of six additional gravestones and a selected bibliography. Price € 75,00 plus postage.

David Henriques de Castro, author of the famous "Keur van grafstenen", is celebrated in a centenary exhibition at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, focusing on the man both as a collector and as a researcher of Sephardic tombstones. His monumental work on the Portuguese Jewish Cemetery at Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, published by Brill (Leiden) in 1883, is photographically reproduced in this re-edition of his classic survey of the 17th- and 18th-century tombstones that mark the graves of the leading figures of Amsterdam's Sephardic community, together with:

- an English translation of de Castro's historical commentary, including descriptions of six additional tombstones
- additional photographs, more than a century old, similarly revealing details which can now no longer be seen
- an introductory article on de Castro's research by Jullie-Marthe Cohen of the Jewish Historical Museum
- a selected bibliography on the Portuguese Jewish Cemetery at Ouderkerk aan de Amstel and other affiliated Sephardic burial grounds, by F.J. Hoogewoud of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana and Dr. Falk Wiesemann of the Heinrich Heine University of Dusseldorf.

The Beth Haim of Ouderkerk by Louis Alvares Vega.



Illustrated book about the cemetery. Published by Pirola, Schoorl. Price € 19,50 plus postage.

Beth Haim, the Portuguese Jewish cemetery at Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, is a magnificent historical monument permeated with a fascinating history. Walking in the cemetery, one cannot help being touched by the beautiful plants surrounding the exquisitely carved gravestones and feeling as if the clock had been set back a few hundred years.

From the splendid seventeenth century on, these stones are poignant from an art-historical and historical perspective. Frequently in the past, artists such as Ruisdael, Romeijn de Hooghe, Bloteling and Bernard Picard have captured the remarkable atmosphere at Beth Haim.

Visitors to the cemetery will immediately notice that all the graves have horizontal stones. Other Jewish cemeteries elsewhere in Holland invariably contain graves with vertical stones. Horizontal gravestones are typical of Holland's Spanish and Portuguese Sephardic cemeteries at Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, The Hague, Rotterdam and Middelburg and overseas near Willemstad on Curacao and at Jodensavanne in Surinam.

Among the oldest stones in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel are the many prism-, cylinder- and sarcophagus-shaped stones which remind us of the Jewish traditions of the Mediterranean. From the mid-seventeenth century on the now generally flat stones were decorated with coats of arms, plants and symbols representing the transience of life that derive from Dutch gravestone art. Similar design are found in Dutch churches too. This is an indication of the degree to which Portuguese Jews were integrated into Dutch society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To give the stones a Jewish character many of the designs were based on biblical scenes connected with the first name of the deceased.

Visitors will notice that many of the stones depict human figures, and they may wonder why this is, considering the second commandment in the Torah (Exodus xx, 4-5) which forbids us to make 'graven images, nor any manner of likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath of that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down unto them, nor serve them'.

In Ashkenazi cemeteries of Jews with roots in Central and Eastern Europe designs on gravestones are limited to depictions of Jewish symbols. For example, representations of the hands raised in the priestly benediction for a cohen (a descendant of the high priest Aaron), the ewer and bowl for a Levite, a circumcision set for a mohel (circumciser), a book for a scholar or a collection box for a philanthropist.

A new reprint of this book was essential to ensure that knowledge about Beth Haim continues to be spread. Visitors to the cemetery can learn more about the historical background. For those interested but unable to visit and cohanim who are forbidden to approach the stones for religious reasons the book offers an opportunity to appreciate the beauty and history of Beth Haim.

It was the late L. Alvares Vega z.l. who, as worthy successor of D. Henriques de Castro, undertook much of the research into the cemetery. This is evident in the second edition of *The Beth Haim at Ouderkerk* which includes his photographs of the gravestones of Rachel and Hanna Vega that he uncovered.

We are grateful to the Alvares Vega family for having made the third edition of this book possible.

Het Beth Haim in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel (in Dutch)



Survey of the history of the cemetery by Lydia Hagoort. Published by Verloren, Hilversum. Price € 34,00 plus postage.

To order a copy please send an email to bethhaim@gmail.com

All proceeds will go to Beth Haim.