CHAPTER FOUR
MEMBERS, ORIGINS, AND PATTERNS OF MIGRATION

Not every adult Jewish man living in a city or village was automatically a member of the local Jewish community. Jews generally had to fulfil a number of conditions in order to become a full member holding hazakah, membership, giving the right to vote in elections, to be elected as a parnas or gabbai, and the obligation to contribute taxes based on income. This system resembles the organisation of burghers in early modern towns, suggesting that both systems have common origins.

An interesting aspect of the role of membership within the concept of community is the position of women members. A few records in the manuscripts indicate that women were able to become independent members, not just as wives of ba’alei battim. Applicants for membership from outside the community present another intriguing group: where did they come from, what general patterns of migration do the sources indicate? These questions are of importance for the history of Dutch Jewry in the context of the wider European Jewish world.

Naturally membership is important enough to be defined in the community regulations. As a rule, a Jew who wished to join a community had to pay a one-off sum, generally known as hakdamah. The amount differed from one community to the next, from five guilders in The Hague, seven and a half guilders in Oisterwijk, to three rijksdaalders in Middelburg. In Oisterwijk, however, theory and practice differed. Most records of admissions of new members mention sums of five guilders and less. Some also paid more than the regular seven and a half guilders. In The Hague, bridegrooms from outside the community had

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2 The Hebrew term for a full member of a community: a householder or head of a family.
3 GA Den Haag, NIG, no. 1, fol. 2. The later takkanot mention ten guilders; GA Den Haag, NIG, no. 625, fol. 43, paragraph 14; ibid., no. 1, regulations paragraph 44.
4 Ros 282b, p. 11, paragraph 21.
5 Zeeuws Archief, NIG Middelburg, no. 1, fol. 1, paragraph 1.
to pay an additional quarter percent of their dowry. These sums were payable by Jews who were not children of existing members. For sons of members who were about to marry and start their own household, the hakdamah was usually lower, varying from one guilder in Oisterwijk to five guilders in The Hague, according to the regulations of 1716 and 1723. This was the same amount paid by a Jew from outside the community who married into a member’s family.

Since no takkanot survive from Leeuwarden, we have to rely on the few records in the sefer zikhronot relating to membership. It seems there was no fixed sum payable by new members. The amounts paid vary from three to 26 guilders. This range suggests that the size of the family may have been a factor: single individuals paid less than large families. And there was also the question of a person’s financial position. In 1785, a man named Abraham ben Mordekhai of Sneek (Friesland) paid two ducats to join, which was high for a single man. Presumably, therefore, he was wealthy.

Imposing different sums on locals and Jews from outside the community was common and occurred in many Ashkenazi communities, although the actual amounts varied. While no regulation ever mentions a minimum capital requirement for an applicant from outside the community, clearly in practice it was necessary to have a certain amount of capital. On the other hand, possessing capital was no guarantee that a person would be accepted (had this been the case there would have been no reason for some Jews not to have been full members); there was clearly an unspoken rule that only those who had enough capital to qualify to pay taxes and to contribute to the community would be eligible. At the same time, the governors often miscalculated the wealth of a potential member, or were intentionally misled. All the manuscripts contain threats and punishments against individuals who failed to pay their taxes regularly. In 1753, the governors in The Hague decided to raise the fee for new members to 100 guilders, because, as the record states, too many outsiders had come to the city, imposing

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6 GA Den Haag, NIG, no. 1, fol. 3.
7 Tresoar, Jewish institutions and communities, no. 1, record no. 111.
8 Ibid., record no. 235.
9 Ibid., record no. 247.
10 This problem occurred in many communities. One way of avoiding this difficulty was to administer oaths in which people testified regarding their true wealth. The texts of these oaths can be found in German pinkassim, e.g., in that of Friedberg, see Litt, op. cit. (2003 [a]), p. 197. The Friedberg oath dates from 1664.