ABRAHAM HAYIM BEN ZVI HIRSCH BRAATBARD
A Hebrew type-setter in Amsterdam
in the first half of the eighteenth century

In the Dutch-Jewish weekly Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad of 23 and 30 March, 1956, Leo Fuks introduced a hitherto unknown Yiddish chronicle on life in the Dutch Republic and in Amsterdam, recorded by an Amsterdam Ashkenazi Jew in the years 1740 until 1752. Abstracts from the chronicle with an introduction and notes followed in the same year. In 1960, the greater part of the Yiddish chronicle was published in Dutch translation in a paperback edition.¹

The author of the chronicle, Abraham Hayim ben Zvi Hirsch Braatbard 'mi-mishpahat koverin' from the Kauweren or Kobryn family as he called himself at the end of his chronicle, was born in Amsterdam in the month of May, 1699. In 1729 he married Sipra Hyman and the couple had nine children, six daughters and three sons.² His manuscript, written in neat Ashkenazi cursive writing, probably remained in private possession up till 1940, when the German army occupied the Netherlands. It came to light after the Second World War in the ruins of Jewish Amsterdam and now reposes in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, University Library of Amsterdam.³

Braatbard's chronicle is an unique personal Jewish document of the middle of the eighteenth century. It not only presents a lively picture of the Amsterdam Jewish community, but also depicts the reaction of the Jews to the revolutionary political events in the Dutch Republic of the

---


² The marriage was registered in the Amsterdam town-hall on 18 November 1729. Braatbard died in 1786, cf. Fuks, 'Jiddische kroniek', 174. The genealogy of the Braatbard family has been written on the fly-leaf of a copy of Sefer migra meforash (Amsterdam: Hertz Levi Rofe and Kosman ben Barukh 1749), which reposes in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, University Library of Amsterdam, shelfmark Ros. 1891 D 18.


Because of Braatbard's outspoken views on the rule of the Amsterdam authorities, and his reflections on the turn of political events in 1747-1752, the chronicle may be considered to reflect the prevailing opinions and moods in the Jewish community of Amsterdam and is an important historical source. The official policy of the governors of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities of Amsterdam, i.e. obedience to the local authorities and a staunch support of the House of Orange, are clearly described and acclaimed by Braatbard.

Because of the intimate and personal style of Braatbard's chronicle and his idiomatic use of the Yiddish language, in which he faithfully renders the spoken language of the Amsterdam Ashkenazim of his time, it was generally believed that he did not belong to the intellectual elite and had not received more than an average Jewish schooling. His lively interest in the economic measures of the Amsterdam authorities on behalf of Jewish trades gave rise to the supposition that he was engaged in business, like his father Zvi Hirsch, who was a broker.

While searching in M. Steinschneider's Index of Printers and Typesetters at the end of his Catalogue of the Hebrew Books in the Bodleian Library in Oxford for quite a different purpose than finding more data on

---

4 Because of the desastrous course of the French invasion in the Dutch Republic in 1747, a descendant of William III of Orange came into office as a Stadtholder. William IV changed the composition of local government by naming adherents of his party, but failed to reform the political structure of the Republic, as many had hoped. The war brought much political unrest and popular revolts; cf. P. Geyl, Revolutiedagen te Amsterdam. Prins Willem IV en de Doe/istenbeweging, The Hague 1936.

5 Braatbard chose the side of the authorities with great vehemence, because of the economic measures which the Doelstien, the Amsterdam revolutionaries of 1748, wanted to introduce (measures that would be nefarious to Jewish trade). Braatbard refers to the leader of the movement, Daniel de Raap, as 'Haman de Raap'. For Braatbard and Amsterdam Jewry at the time, the Doelstien were no less than dangerous anti-semites who wanted to destroy the livelihood of the Jews; see Braatbard, Zeven Provinciën, 69-92.

6 Fuks, 'Jiddische kroniek', 114.

7 In the Register of a special income-tax of the Amsterdam municipal authorities of 1742, Zvi Hirsch is inscribed under the name of Hartog Samuels as a broker with a yearly income of 600 guilders; Fuks, 'Jiddische kroniek', 114.