On 2 January 1816 the City Hall of Amsterdam was crowded with authorities. Besides the burgomasters and the provincial governor, nearly forty high-ranking members of the Amsterdam society had assembled. One of them was the Sephardi Abraham Mendes de Leon. He and the others were, by royal decree, reinstated as members of the local council of Amsterdam.¹ As a politician connected to the Jewish community, it was his duty to represent this part of Amsterdam society in these circles.

The emancipation decree of 1796 gave the Dutch Jews the right to vote and run for office. In the Batavian Republic, one of the precursors of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the first Jewish parliamentarians in history were chosen in 1797. The Amsterdam Ashkenazi Patriots H.L. Bromet and H. de H. Lemon were elected representatives in the National Assembly. However, due to the ongoing political turmoil that was characteristic of the Batavian Republic, their term was short. Being involved in a radical coup d’état, both lost their seats in 1798. Besides the national political scene, Jews were also involved during these Batavian-French times in local politics. Jews participated in the local councils of both Amsterdam and The Hague.²

In the historiography of Dutch Jewry, however, the presence of Jewish politicians in the first half of the nineteenth century has hardly been noticed. Moreover, the present opinion is that Dutch society did not accept Jews as political representatives from the start of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1814 until the constitutional change in 1848.³ While

¹ Gemeentearchief Amsterdam (GAA), city council (archive 5079), minutes 2 January 1816 (film 1130).
² J. Michman, 'The High Point of Jewish Political Activity', in J. Michman, Dutch Jewry during the Emancipation Period 1787-1815, Gothic Turrets on a Corinthian Building (Amsterdam 1995) 77-89.

S. Berger, M. Brocke and I. Zwiep (eds), Zutot 2003, 173-177
this may hold for parliament and provincial politics, local politics reveal quite different patterns.

When the Napoleonic Empire fell in 1814, the Kingdom of the Netherlands was created under the leadership of William I of Orange, and many political innovations of the Batavians and French were maintained. Although some Christians and Jews were in favour of reinstalling the old ‘Jewish Nation’ system, the king and his advisors decided not to revoke the civil rights of the Jews. Thanks to this decision, the Jewish politicians in the local councils kept their seats.

In the period 1814-1848, during the reigns of William I (1814-1840) and William II (1840-1849), Jews were politically active in various cities. In Amsterdam Jewish representation in the city council was nearly continuous. Abraham Mendes de Leon, who had also been a member of the council during the French period, held a seat until his death in 1818. In 1824 Dr Immanuel Capadoce was elected one of Amsterdam’s representatives. At that time he was already old, which was the reason that he could do little for the public welfare in these circles. He died in 1826. Jacob Mendes de Leon, son of the above-mentioned Abraham, enjoyed a longer term, from 1828 until 1842. Samuel Teixeira de Mattos took his place as Jewish representative, and served society between 1845-1857.

In The Hague, where the king lived, Isaac Henrique de Castro was elected a member of the city council in 1824. Having been a local councillor in the days of king Louis Napoleon and the French annexation, he was already quite experienced. He occupied this position until his death in 1849. His colleague Daniël Mozes Ezchiels, the most prominent Rotterdam Jew, served an even longer term in the Rotterdam council,

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4 The information on the members of the Amsterdam city council comes from P. Holland (with the collaboration of B. Hesp), *Leden van de Raad, de Amsterdamse gemeenteraad 1814-1941* (Amsterdam 1998) 141f., 220, 278.

5 *Oprege ’s Gravenhaagsche Stads-almanak, voor het jaar 1823* (’s-Gravenhage 1823); *’s Gravenhaagsche Stads almanak 1836-1851* (’s-Gravenhage 1836-1851); on his term as member of the local council during the French period: Joods Historisch Museum Amsterdam, family archive De Pinto, no. 4842 (burgomaster to De Castro 3 August 1811); no. 4844 (invitation to De Castro for a meeting of the council 21 October 1813); no. 8581 (invitation to De Castro by king Louis Napoleon for a diner 4 September 1811); no. 8582 (idem 1812); no. 8585 (idem for a feast in 1811); in the same archive an invitation by king William II to De Castro as member of the council for a ball at the palace: no. 8585.