

THE PERSISTENCE OF IMAGES:
REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS IN THE HISTORY OF
SEPHARDI SEPULCHRAL ART

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Wandering Stones and Sumptuous Memories

Beneath magnificently decorated funereal slabs, sarcophagi and rectangular tombs with prism-shaped lids (*ohalim*), lauded in moving eulogies, *hakhamim*, *talmidei hakhamim*, as well as the pillars of the flourishing Sephardi communities of Hamburg, Glückstadt, Amsterdam, and Curaçao—rabbis, cantors, community elders, and merchants—sleep their last sleep, wept over by cupids, putti, Graces, and children (figs. 1–2);¹ they lie protected by angels, lambs, birds, a pair of rampant lions, and signs of the zodiac, honored with heraldic shields, and ornamented with flowering sprigs, baskets of flowers, round arches, half-columns and pilasters, drapery and a variety of motifs that have definite *vanitas* or *memento mori* connotations (e.g. *vanitas* texts [Isaiah 40:6; Psalms 103:15; Job 14:1–2], skeletons [fig. 3],² skulls with crossed bones, hourglasses, flowers, heavenly hands wielding an axe in order to fell the Tree of Life,³ a broken bridge or ship’s mast,⁴ a single lamb, etc.), all of which were symbols typically used by Calvinists and Lutherans.⁵ Thanks to their profuse, ostentatious, and exuberant, decorative patterns, their elaborate Hebrew, Portuguese, or Spanish epitaphs, and the scriptural scenes and biblical imagery (fig. 3a),⁶ as well as the outstanding

¹ M. Studemund-Halévy and G. Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht. Der jüdische Friedhof Königstrasse* (Hamburg 2004), p. 106 (second enlarged and improved edition).

² J. Faust and M. Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschland* (Glückstadt 1997), p. 50.

³ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 106.

⁴ I. S. Emmanuel, *Precious Stones of the Jews of Curaçao. Curaçaoan Jewry 1656–1957* (New York 1957) [figs. 54–55].

⁵ F. Koniijn, “De grafstenen van Bet Haim,” in *Exôdo. Portugezen in Amsterdam 1600–1680*, ed. R. Kistemaker and T. Levie (Amsterdam 1987); Sh. L. Stuart, “The Portuguese Jewish Community in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam: Images of Commemoration and Documentation” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1992), p. 312.

⁶ L. A. Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk* (Ouderkerk 1994), p. 37.

community members interred there, Sephardi burial grounds constitute some of the most significant Jewish burial sites of Europe and the West Indies.⁷ Reflecting different cultural, ideological, and social identities, backgrounds and conflicts, the circumstances of these gravesites need to be explored further.⁸

The observant viewer becomes aware of the ornamental profusion, not only in the form of religious and non-religious symbols of what is often termed “Jewish ceremonial art,” and which do not at first appear to be characteristic of Jewish art and which demonstrate an intense cultural exchange between Jews and Christians.⁹ It probably can only be satisfactorily explained as an art that “reflects the Jewish experience”¹⁰ and as having resulted from the hybrid material culture of the host country and Christian tainted involvement (see e.g. the shocking and as yet not satisfactorily explained representation of God on the tombstone of Samuel Senior Teixeira [Amsterdam 1717]¹¹ and in Jewish marriage contracts [*ketubbot*],¹² but also in the breathtaking composition of the texts and stone material as well as the equally artistic combination of symbols and motifs, in addition to images and languages).¹³

⁷ See notes 44 and 45.

⁸ H. Künzl, *Jüdische Grabkunst. Von der Antike bis heute* (Darmstadt 1999); idem, “Zur künstlerischen Gestaltung des portugiesisch-jüdischen Friedhofs in Hamburg-Altona,” in *Studien zur jüdischen Geschichte und Soziologie. Festschrift Julius Carlebach* (Heidelberg 1992), pp. 165–74.

⁹ E. Frojmovic (ed.), *Imagining the Self, Imagining the Other. Visual Representations and Jewish-Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period* (Leiden 2002); D. Wolfthal, *Picturing Yiddish. Gender, Identity, and Memory in the Illustrated Yiddish Books of Renaissance Italy* (Leiden 2004).

¹⁰ V. B. Mann and G. Tucker (eds.), *The Seminar on Jewish Art: January–September 1984. Proceedings* (New York 1985), p. 10.

¹¹ M. Freidman, “Pagan Images in Jewish Art,” *Jewish Art* 9 (1983–1984), pp. 124–47; E. S. Saltman, “The ‘Forbidden Image’ in Jewish Art,” *Jewish Art* 8 (1981), pp. 42–53. The artistically rendered tombstone, the handiwork of a Christian stonemason, shows a wonderfully garbed Almighty who appears to Samuel in the Temple at Shilo. Presumably this stone was made to order for a Christian client, only later coming into the Teixeira family’s possession. See also F. Landsberger, *A History of Jewish Art* (Cincinnati 1946), p. 257; R. Wischnitzer-Bernstein, *Symbole und Gestalten der jüdischen Kunst* (Berlin 1935).

¹² On Christian motifs in *ketubbot*, see Sh. Sabar, “The Use and Meaning of Christian Motifs in Illustrations of Jewish Marriage Contracts in Italy,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 10 (1984), pp. 47–63; idem, *Ketubbah. Jewish Marriage Contracts of Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum and Klaus Library* (Philadelphia 1990).

¹³ I would like to express my appreciation to the Institute for the History of the Jews in Germany for generous support enabling me to undertake research on Sephardi cemeteries in Germany, Holland, and Italy.

For German art historian Hannelore Künzl,

Sephardi Jews' sepulchral art, the richest and most interesting examples of which are to be found in the cemeteries in Ouderkerk and Altona, was initially influenced by the Christian world in which they had lived as forcibly baptized individuals for more than a century and whose art had made an impression on them. However, over time their return to Judaism also brought about a return to Jewish ideas and ways of thinking in which figurative scenes have their place, for example as book illustrations, but not in sepulchral art. Instead, there developed here a Jewish symbolism, which is also typical of tombstones in the Ashkenazi domain.¹⁴

Unfortunately, Künzl does not ask why the figurative scenes only begin to appear in Hamburg in the last third of the seventeenth century, i.e. at a time when the Sephardi community had already thrived for three generations and, despite continued *marrano* immigration, could scarcely be associated with the sepulchral art of the Iberian Peninsula. In contrast, however, the “return to Jewish ideas and ways of thinking” had a great deal to do with the beginnings of Jewish letterpress printing in Amsterdam. And what for Künzl is Christian and confined to letterpress printing is definitely found on Sephardi graves of the Old and New World. American art historian Rochelle Weinstein argues that the sumptuous Sephardi sepulchral decoration derives from the Calvinist-Lutheran language of forms, the decoration, as well as the choice of decorative subjects, being attributed to the artistic interaction of the Portuguese communities with the Dutch or German (fig. 3b). In her important dissertation on sepulchral decoration in the cemetery in Ouderkerk (unfortunately never published in book form), Weinstein investigated the individual visual motifs and compared them with possible models from Christian art.¹⁵ Other models included illustrated Christian and Jewish books, as well as Sephardi books written and created, if not by Jewish artists then certainly for a Jewish market, and very often printed in Christian shops and decorated with pictures

¹⁴ H. Künzl, *Jüdische Grabkunst*; idem, “Zur künstlerischen Gestaltung,” pp. 165–74; M. Studemund-Halévy, “Pedra e Livro. Arte sepulcral Sefardita em Hamburgo—Contribuição para um estudo,” in *O Património Judaico Português. I Colóquio Internacional, Lisboa 9 a 11 de Janeiro de 1996* (Lisbon 1996 [sic]), pp. 251–73.

¹⁵ R. Weinstein, “Sepulchral Monuments of the Jews of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York 1979); idem, “The Storied Stones of Altona. Biblical Imagery on Sefardic Tombstones at the Jewish Cemetery of Altona—Königstraße, Hamburg,” in *Die Sefarden in Hamburg. Zur Geschichte einer Minderheit*, vol. 2, ed. M. Studemund-Halévy (Hamburg 1997), pp. 551–660; Stuart, “Portuguese Jewish Community.”

copied from Christian sources, in this case largely from the flourishing Dutch printing presses.¹⁶ Weinstein's evidence indicates how irrefutable insights can be gleaned above all from the Sephardi libraries, in which the role played by Christian literature was a considerable one, in more than percentage terms alone.¹⁷ According to art historian Shane Loise Stuart, the earliest tombs of the members of the (Amsterdam) community utilized the "traditional Jewish styles, the later tombs demonstrated that the ornament in the cemetery had shifted from an emphasis on the style or types of tombs to one of tomb decoration."¹⁸

But what was the process that placed a particular motif on a tombstone (figs. 3c–3d)?¹⁹ Was it the deceased who wanted a gravestone as he himself envisaged it? Was it the family or the community? Are we dealing with gravestone art to order, or did the anonymous artists or stonemasons, who carved and created the tombstones, have a range of ready-made stones to which only the text or the name and date of death had to be added? Unfortunately, for Amsterdam and Hamburg, unlike Venice, our information is limited concerning the testamentary provisions or last will and testament drawn up by the deceased during their lifetime: the quality of the stone to be used (e.g. costly marble or sandstone), the choice of language and lettering (Hebrew, Portuguese, Spanish; monolingual, bilingual, etc.), the inscription on the grave (sepulchral text, poem), or the *vanitas* symbols, which conveyed a message of man's fleeting existence.²⁰

One of the few authors of Hamburg grave inscriptions about whom we know is the Amsterdam rabbi Selomoh de Oliveyra²¹ who composed the epitaph for the gravestone of Hamburg rabbi and renowned philolo-

¹⁶ Wolfthal, *Picturing Yiddish*.

¹⁷ M. Stuedmund-Halévy, "Codices Gentium. Samuel de Isaac Abas, coleccionista de libros hamburgués," in *Familia, Religión y Negocio. El sefardismo en las relaciones entre el mundo ibérico y los Países Bajos en la Edad Moderna*, ed. J. Contreras et al. (Madrid 2003), pp. 287–319; idem, "Livré aux livres: Samuel Abas, érudit et bibliophile séfaraide de Hambourg," in *Romanistik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Stuart, "Portuguese Jewish Community," p. 312.

¹⁹ On the genesis and popularity of the *carita* or *caritas* image, known from numerous works in European and Jewish art, see E. Wind, "Charity: The Case of History of Pattern," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1 (1938), pp. 322–30; Sabar, *Ketubbah*.

²⁰ W. Martin, *De Hollandsche schilderkunst in de zeventiende eeuw*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam 1935–1936), p. 302; Stuart, "Portuguese Jewish Community," p. 286.

²¹ J. A. Brombacher, "Chofne Zetim. Handen vol Olijven. De poezie van Selomoh d'Oliveyra, rabbijn en leraar van de Portugese Natie in de 17e eeuw te Amsterdam" (Ph.D. diss., Leiden 1991).

gist David Cohen de Lara (fig. 3e).²² But unfortunately, we do not know who was ultimately responsible for the artistic design of this tombstone. Other authors of Hamburg sepulchral texts include the Hamburg rabbis Moses Abudiente (many of whose [unpublished] Hebrew poems can be found in Amsterdam Jewish libraries) and Abraham Meldola. Use was also made of other people's inscriptions. Thus, for Moses and Naftali Hirz Wessely, use was made of both the epitaph of Amsterdam rabbi Isaac Uziel and also a free translation of a laudatory poem by Joseph Franco Serrano that sang the praises of this selfsame Isaac Uziel, and which Abraham Meldola passed off as his own.²³

We know almost nothing about the stonemasons who were ultimately responsible for flawlessly casting the inscriptions in stone in compliance with the Jewish tradition of grave inscriptions. While there is no doubt whatsoever that there was a Jewish fraternity that was responsible for burying the dead, it is not known whether—in the seventeenth century at least—there were Jewish stonemasons in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Glückstadt, Curaçao, or Venice, due to the exclusion of Jews from the craft guilds. Elsewhere in Europe the communities had specially trained stonemasons [*masewe-schlägere*] who fashioned the tombstone in collaboration with the rabbi, but one can wonder whether such was the case in the seventeenth century. The perfectly shaped Hebrew letters and the respect for the Jewish tradition of grave inscriptions may well indicate that this was the case, but it is also perfectly feasible that a Christian stonemason, with or without help from a Jewish assistant, could have followed very detailed drawings.

²² Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*.

²³ Originally written in Hebrew, the poem appeared as *Octava Acrostica* in Daniel Levi de Barrios's book *Triumpho del Gobierno Popular* (Amsterdam 5443 [1683]); see M. and R. Sarraga, "Hamburg's Sephardi Hebrew Epitaphic Poems in Amsterdam Texts," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12 (2005), pp. 330–70. From the documents that have been examined here, it becomes evident that the published and unpublished literature of the Portuguese Jews in Hamburg and Amsterdam was one of the major sources for the epitaphs. See also M. Studemund-Halévy, "La mort de Sara et la source de Miriam: Interprétation d'une épitaphe du cimetière juif de Hambourg," *Materia Giudaica* 10 (2005), pp. 353–63.

Network of Sephardi Art

The dissemination of Sephardi tombstone iconography and Sephardi sepulchral language corresponds to a global network, whereby the intensive interchange and interrelationship between Sephardi communities (far-flung networks of family connections and kinship-based commerce)²⁴ leads to a certain standardization of artistic design and epitaphs, with only insignificant local distinctions. Besides the maintenance of prevailing sepulchral traditions, of which biblical citations are a part, a leading role is played in this state of affairs by the fact that inscriptions were composed not only for members of the local community, but also for far-flung customers. Furthermore, commercial distributors also supplied gravestones for overseas clients, thereby disseminating identical art and language forms. This globalization, which at the same time sheds light on international commercial relations in Sephardi families, is of great interest to more than Diaspora experts. After all, Portuguese and Spanish epitaphs on Jewish tombstones are almost forgotten parts of Iberian culture outside the Peninsula, and neglected parts of Sephardi art history within the field of Jewish art.²⁵

Sephardi Tombstones

Covering an entire burial plot, funereal slabs are marvelously fashioned works of art with decorative biblical and allegorical images. Some are closed horizontally at the top, while others finish with a curved arch, whether connected to pillars or not. Generally the stone is delineated by raised rosettes, frequently in the geometric, ornamental figure of the “eternal wheel,” as well as round, rosette-like decorations on the corners outside the frame, familiar to us from Jewish sarcophagi of antiquity. However, this decoration is also reminiscent of contemporary Catholic models on the Iberian Peninsula and their Protestant counterparts in northern Europe. Apart from rosettes, the most frequent decorative

²⁴ D. M. Swetchinski, “Kinship and Commerce: The Foundations of Portuguese Jewish Life in Seventeenth-Century Holland,” *StRos* 15 (1981), pp. 52–74.

²⁵ K. Brown, “Spanish, Portuguese, and Neo-Latin Poetry Written and/or Published by Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sephardim from Hamburg and Frankfurt (1–3),” *Sefarad* 59 (1999), pp. 3–42; 60 (2000), pp. 227–53; 61 (2001), pp. 3–56. See also Studemund-Halévy, “La mort de Sara.”

elements are leafy grapevines, astragal friezes, palm branches, volutes, and cartouches with escutcheons, complete with heraldic decorations or draperies as a frame.²⁶ Fashioned parts of the surface, containing inscriptions, symbolic motifs, or pictorial scenes, are carved either into the depth of the stone or in relief, and offset from the rest of the stone slab by fine edging. The realistic and vivid three-dimensional reliefs are generally set in the fields at the head or foot, while, with few exceptions, the escutcheons are always in the middle. On the horizontal funereal slabs, the largely Christian stonemasons liked to set the inscriptions in woven wreaths, decorative floral ribbons, and baroque cartouches. Half-naked cherubs, putti or angels or crying infants with outspread handkerchiefs, frequently filled with inscriptions, mourn the dead. The flat, recumbent, horizontally placed,²⁷ and sometimes stuccoed funereal slabs are ornamented with Hebrew or Portuguese-Spanish texts, either arranged running round the slab or set with more or less artistic effect in consecutive lines. The engraved writing is almost always in Hebrew, at the head, and Portuguese, at the foot. Also common are finely incised letters and chiseled floral and geometrical ornaments.

The Portuguese or Spanish texts are almost always in Latin capital letters (with or without italic swashes), more rarely in script.²⁸ Aljamiado texts—inscriptions in Hebrew letters, but also in Spanish or Judeo-Spanish—are only present for cemeteries in the Ottoman Empire.²⁹ The generally bilingual sepulchral texts are normally framed by ornamental or architectural features. They are often placed within round or oval medallions or woven wreaths, or integrated with sweeping strokes in baroque cartouches or framed in plant matter. More rarely they are found on single or double tablets, perhaps intended to symbolize the Tablets of the Law as “Tablets of the Covenant.” Another grave shape unfamiliar to many visitors is reminiscent of a tent or pyramid, having small triangular sides and culminating in a point. The entire area of

²⁶ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, pp. 122–23.

²⁷ The Portuguese Jews in Denmark were very unhappy at not being able to have their tombstones placed horizontally according to their own tradition; see the tombstone for Luna Franco, d. 1716, buried at the Møllegade cemetery (established 1693); K. Kryger, “Jewish Sepulchral Art in Denmark,” in *Danish Jewish Art*, ed. M. Gelfer-Jørgensen (Copenhagen 1999), pp. 229–63.

²⁸ Precise attribution is frequently impossible because of interferences by the different Romance languages and dialects, as well as possible errors by stonemasons.

²⁹ Emmanuel, *Precious Stones of the Jews of Curaçao*; M. Studemund-Halévy, *Sefardische Grabinschriften aus Istanbul* (forthcoming).

the long sides is occupied by a Hebrew or Hebrew-and-Portuguese text, sometimes separated only by a family escutcheon.³⁰ A richly decorative ribbon of floral elements frames the longitudinal text boxes. The top edge is often formed by a narrow ribbon with text lines and/or floral elements, while on the two short sides are artistic motifs such as a tree, sun (fig. 4),³¹ a biblical scene or an open book, floral elements and emblems. In one case the pyramidal roof (today destroyed) was supported by four angels stationed at the corners.

The most interesting graves from Hamburg, Amsterdam, Venice and Curaçao, artistically, date back to the last third of the seventeenth and first third of the eighteenth centuries; in the nineteenth century there was a decline in the desire for a distinctly artistic design, and simple funereal slabs were the rule. As in the case of the Catholics and Protestants, the declared purpose of Sephardi sepulchral art was always to present the deceased as a God-fearing individual, but at the same time the stone served to visibly represent the deceased and his family as a sign of family pride. This pride is abundantly clear, above all, in the use of material (e.g. marble),³² the epitaphs (e.g. composed by poetically gifted rabbis, cantors, or community members),³³ and the grave decoration.³⁴ Those whose means allowed, commissioned inscriptions from scholars and poets who, in the *musive* or mosaic style, made elaborate use in their epitaphs especially of biblical and Talmudic quotations.³⁵ In addition, because the authors of these poetic epitaphs (and those who commissioned them) frequently intended them as literary works that would draw the admiring looks of a large and educated public, these sepulchral texts naturally also form part of Spanish and Portuguese

³⁰ On the *alma ibérica*, the myth of an aristocratic Iberian past, which was also manifested in the ostentatious use of coats of arms, see H. den Boer, "Las múltiples caras de la identidad. Nobleza y fidelidad ibéricas entre los sefardíes de Amsterdam," in *Familia, Religión y Negocio*, pp. 95–112; M. Studemund-Halévy, "Les aléas de la foi. Parcours d'un jeune Portugais entre église et synagogue," in *Memoria. Wege Jüdischen Erinnerns. Festschrift für Michael Brocke zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. B. E. Klein and C. E. Müller (Berlin 2005), pp. 363–82 [367–69].

³¹ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 85.

³² Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*.

³³ For Ouderkerk for example, Shelomoh de Oliveyra and David Franco Mendes; for Venice, Leone Modena; for Hamburg, Mose de Gideon Abudiente and Abraham Meldola; see Brombacher, *Chofne Zetim. Handen vol Olijven*; R. Arnold, *Spracharkaden. Die Sprache der sephardischen Juden in Italien im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg 2006); M. Studemund-Halévy, *Biographisches Lexikon der Hamburger Sefarden* (Hamburg 2000).

³⁴ Künzl, *Jüdische Grabkuns*.

³⁵ See Arnold, *Spracharkaden*.

literary history.³⁶ Just how important these inscriptions were for those who commissioned them is shown in particular by testamentary provisions, though we have, unfortunately, relatively few extant examples.³⁷ Thus Gabriel Jesurun Dias, for example, who died in Venice in 1623, gave precise instructions for his funereal slab: “con il suo epitafio in hebraico come parerà meglio et in lettere volgari dica—aqui jas gabriel jesurun diaz.”³⁸

Marble made Hamburg’s Sephardi cemetery, which was inaugurated in 1611, Germany’s largest free-standing marble field (fig. 5).³⁹ The costly marble was imported directly from Italy, or reached the northern European Sephardi metropolises (probably) via Amsterdam or Lübeck. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Amsterdam became the largest foreign importer of Italian marble, almost all of it imported into the Netherlands via Livorno.⁴⁰ Carrara marble was supplied in standard sizes, and Amsterdam even employed a professional stonemason (fig. 6).⁴¹ Rich Sephardi families from Amsterdam and Hamburg even had their tombstones hewn in Genoa. Members of the European Sephardi communities who had emigrated to the New World ordered their tombstones and epitaphs in Amsterdam, a practice that also resulted in identical artistic and linguistic forms spreading around the globe.⁴²

Foreigners in seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century Amsterdam would stand in astonishment, full of admiration and amazement, before the ornately decorated Christian and Jewish tombstones. In their letters and reports, they praised the Bet Haim cemetery and the elaborated epitaphs and ostentatious decorum, which were as ornate as they were learned, sending word of the patently obvious magnificence of the

³⁶ Brown, “Spanish, Portuguese, and Neo-Latin Poetry”; see also Studemund-Halévy, “La mort de Sara.”

³⁷ R. Arnold, “‘Selhe ponhá húa boa pedra.’ Dispositionen zu venezianischen Grabsteinen und Inschriften in sephardischen Testamenten,” in *Ein Leben für die jüdische Kunst. Gedenkband für Hannelore Künzl*, ed. M. Graetz (Heidelberg 2003), pp. 69–86; idem, *Spracharkaden*; idem, “Stein und Bewusstsein. Aschkenasische und sephardische Sepulkraltraditionen auf dem Friedhof in Venedig,” *Kalonymos* 9 (2006), pp. 4–5.

³⁸ Arnold, *Spracharkaden* p. 272. For Curaçao see Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, p. 248.

³⁹ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, pp. 181–84.

⁴⁰ F. Scholten, *Sumptuous Memories. Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Tomb Sculpture* (Zwolle 2003); Stuart, “Portuguese Jewish Community.”

⁴¹ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 30.

⁴² On the trade of Amsterdam gravestones in the colonies, see Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*; for Venice, see Arnold, *Spracharkaden*, p. 283.

Portuguese figures that they reflected.⁴³ We learn from their reports that the Sephardi cemetery was a site of particular interest for curious Europeans, and that Amsterdam's official tour program included not only the city's sumptuously decorated Christian sepulchral monuments, but also the Portuguese cemetery in Ouderkerk, inaugurated in 1614, and the enormous Esnoga, established in 1675, symbolizing the community's wealth and power.⁴⁴ Both of these "places of pride" repeatedly attracted Dutch artists like Jacob Isaaksz. van Ruisdael, Abraham Blooteling, Romeyn de Hooghe,⁴⁵ Dirk Dalens II, Benjamin Senior Godines (cemetery),⁴⁶ and de Witt (esnoga),⁴⁷ who sketched the imaginative forms, the drawings and etchings being commissioned by a Sephardi or Dutch patron.⁴⁸

It was undoubtedly this special Jewish sepulchral art and language, with its exotic effect on the observer, that, as early as the end of the nineteenth century, motivated scholars to undertake detailed investigations of the Sephardi cemeteries from historical, genealogical, and linguistic viewpoints.⁴⁹ Today practically all the significant Spanish-Portuguese cemeteries in Europe and the New World have been researched, albeit in varying degrees of detail and quality.⁵⁰ And because the number of

⁴³ On the lavish lifestyle of the Amsterdam Portuguese community, see Y. Kaplan, "Gente Política: The Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam vis-à-vis Dutch Society," in *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, ed. Ch. Brasz and Y. Kaplan (Leiden 2001), pp. 21–40; idem, "Ellis Veryard sobre judíos y judaísmo; impresiones de un turista inglés del siglo XVII," in *Judaísmo Hispano. Estudios en memoria de José Luis Lacave Riaño*, vol. 2, ed. E. Romero (Madrid 2002), pp. 809–17.

⁴⁴ M. Zell, *Reframing Rembrandt. Jews and the Christian Images in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (Berkeley 2002), p. 35; Stuart, "Portuguese Jewish Community."

⁴⁵ Romeyn de Hooghe and his student Aveele influenced the design of seven Curaçao and Ouderkerk stones; see R. Weinstein, "Stones of Memory: Revelations from a Cemetery in Curaçao," in *Sephardim in the Americas*, ed. M. A. Cohen and A. J. Peck (Tuscaloosa & London 1993), pp. 81–140 [127].

⁴⁶ Konijn, "De grafstenen van Bet Haim," p. 102 (fig. 151); Künzl, *Jüdische Grabkunst*.

⁴⁷ Y. Kaplan, "For Whom Did Emanuel de Witte Paint His Three Pictures of the Sephardi Synagogue in Amsterdam?" in his *An Alternative Path to Modernity. The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden 2000), pp. 29–50; I. Manke, *Emanuel de Witte* (Amsterdam 1963).

⁴⁸ Zell, *Reframing Rembrandt*, pp. 34–40; Stuart, "Portuguese Jewish Community," pp. 7 ff. and 271 ff.

⁴⁹ For a comprehensive bibliography on Jewish cemeteries and Jewish funeral art, see F. Wiesemann, *Sepulcra judaica. Bibliographie zu jüdischen Friedhöfen und zu Sterben, Begräbnis und Trauer bei den Juden von der Zeit des Hellenismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Essen 2005).

⁵⁰ Hamburg: M. Grunwald, *Portugiesengräber auf deutscher Erde* (Hamburg 1902); M. Studemund-Halévy, *Biographisches Lexikon der Hamburger Sefarden* (Hamburg 2000); Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, pp. 122–23; M. Studemund-

Sephardi burial sites is relatively small, compared with their Ashkenazi counterparts, it has now become possible to make comprehensive statements about Sephardi sepulchral art and language to an extent that would have been impossible as recently as several decades ago. The fact is that the tombstones constitute an “archive of stone” that helps us to understand history and reveals the influences to which this community was exposed in the course of its history. At present, interdisciplinary research is a *sine qua non*.⁵¹

In light of the growing interest in the Sephardi world and its sepulchral culture, it is therefore surprising that, to date, no attempt has been made to study Sephardi graves, not only from an interdisciplinary standpoint, but also in terms of the connections with other graves, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi. Generally speaking, the numerous, recent publications on Sephardi cemeteries superficially review the history of the cemeteries and communities, highlight the epigraphic meaning of the stones, and undertake just a short discussion of their artistic design and the symbols used. On the whole they confine themselves

Halévy, *MiDor LeDor. Die Grabinschriften des Neuen Portugiesenfriedhofs in Hamburg-Ohlsdorf* (forthcoming).

Glückstadt: M. Studemund-Halévy, “Die portugiesisch-spanischen Grabinschriften in Norddeutschland: Glückstadt und Emden,” *Aschkenas* 7 (1997), pp. 389–439; idem, “Os epitáfios luso-espanhóis no norte de Alemanha; Glückstadt e Emden,” *Lusorama* 36 (1998), pp. 63–81; Faust and Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschland*; J. Faust and M. Studemund-Halévy, *Der Glückstädter Portugiesenfriedhof* (forthcoming).

Amsterdam: D. H. de Castro, *Keur van Grafsteenen op de Nederl.-Portug.-Israel. Begraafplaatste Ouderkerk aan de Amstel* (Leiden 1883; reprint Ouderkerk 1999).

Curaçao: Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*; Weinstein, “Stones of Memory.”

Barbados: E. M. Shilstone, *Monumental Inscriptions in the Burial Ground of the Jewish Synagogue at Bridgetown, Barbados* (London/New York 1956).

Jamaica: R. D. Barnett, and P. Wright, *The Jews of Jamaica. Tombstone Inscriptions, 1663–1880* (Jerusalem 1997).

Nevis: M. M. Terrel, *Jewish Community of Early Colonial Nevis. A Historical Archaeological Study* (Gainseville 2005).

St. Thomas: J. Margolinsky, *Two Hundred and Ninety-nine Epitaphs on the Jewish Cemetery in St. Thomas, W.I., 1837–1916* (2d. ed.; Copenhagen 1957).

Surinam: A. Ben-Ur, “Still Life: Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and West African Art and Form in Suriname’s Jewish Cemeteries,” *American Jewish History* 92 (2004), pp. 31–79; A. Ben-Ur and R. Frankel, *Remnant Stones* (forthcoming).

New York: D. De Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone. Early Jewish Settlers 1682–1831* (New York 1952).

Venice: A. Berliner, *Luchot avanim. Hebräische Grabinschriften in Italien. Erster Teil. 200 Inschriften aus Venedig 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main 1881); A. Luzzato, *La comunità ebraica di Venezia e il suo antico cimitero* (Milan 2000).

⁵¹ See the thought-provoking comments in Ben-Ur, “Still Life.”

to genealogical information, place of birth and death, cause of death, occupational details, communal offices, honorary title, and so on.

Sepulchral Art and Language

Surprisingly little scholarly attention has been paid to Sephardi funeral art in isolation. No book has been devoted exclusively to this topic. Sephardi funeral art has only been discussed in general works on Jewish art and Jewish epigraphy. Just a few publications have been devoted to the influence of Christian paintings and book illustrations on Sephardi funeral art. Most studies of Jewish cemeteries and Jewish funeral art do not include convincing, interdisciplinary discussions on topics of epigraphy, iconography, pictography, or biography in the context of Jewish, Sephardi, and non-Jewish history and the cultural and artistic environment. Ultimately, these Jewish or Sephardi cemeteries were located in the midst of a non-Jewish majority society, and frequently these Sephardi cemeteries consisted of two cemetery areas, often rigorously separated: Sephardi and Ashkenazi.⁵² Viewed in the light of Jewish design and aniconism, the preference for sumptuous decorations and biblical imagery is surprising, but looking at Sephardi artistic manifestations of various types—such as lavishly illuminated Bibles and Haggadot, fully decorated *ketubbot* and ceremonial objects—it becomes obvious that most of the pictorial program of Sephardi tombstones is rooted in a Jewish cultural environment but nonetheless echoes the surrounding Christian cultural and religious environment. In this way, the Sephardi tombstones reflect the peripatetic history of the Jewish people, the tendency of Jewish art, as well as significant influence of the contemporary Christian visual culture, to bear the imprimatur of the time and place in which it was created.

To this day, it is rare for historians, art historians, or philologists of modern languages to use Sephardi tombstones, with their sumptuous decoration and sometimes highly elaborate epitaphs, as sources for art history, linguistic, or cross-cultural studies. Rather, the tombstones have provided historians, genealogists, and biographers with more precise

⁵² The artistic interrelationship of both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi cemeteries as important historical and artistic records was recognized by A. Ruben, *A Jewish Iconography* (London 1954).

information regarding genealogy (father, mother, children), choice of first name and family name (thus, for the *ex-marranos* and New Jews, specifically, the name Esther became a myth and a topos in their literature),⁵³ change of name on the occasion of a *rogativa*,⁵⁴ religious background (proselytes), dates of birth and death, age at death, *gematriot* and chronograms, birthplace (important for studying geographical spread), marital status, terms for children and non-married persons (*yeled/yalda*, *na'ar/na'ara*, *bachur/betula*, etc.).⁵⁵ These tombstones have also provided details concerning secular or religious functions and professions of the dead, their honorific positions, group membership, devoutness, erudition, the individual's life and death, or cause of death (epidemics, wars, crimes). Scholars have found relevant information also regarding belief in death and afterlife, and have paid attention to issues of language choice, distribution of languages, language changes, poetry, biblical and talmudic quotations, references to the New Testament in Jewish epitaphs, epithets (Jewish and non-Jewish *epitheta ornantia*), formulas (dedications and memory; expressions of grief, etc.), forms and genres, gender studies (men and women in Jewish epitaphs), etc. Such information has helped Jewish and religious studies scholars to gain a better understanding of the Jewish idea of mourning and death through the ages.

Unfortunately, to this day there is a dearth of broader comparative studies, both in geographical and historical terms, on the interaction between Jewish and Christian art, although the images concerning the Portuguese communities of Hamburg, Amsterdam, and the West Indies have been addressed in a number of studies. As an “archive of stone,” the language and art of these stones can also often act as a valuable alternative source of information on the history of the Jews of a particular city, region, or country. And because practically all Sephardi communities, whether in Europe or the West Indies, were interconnected by close family and economic ties, this internationalization and standardization of Sephardi sepulchral art and language will, at the same time, provide information about international trade relations and

⁵³ G. Nahon, “D’un singulier désir à la Loi du Dieu d’Israël: les nouveaux-chrétiens portugais en France,” in *La Diaspora des Nouveaux-Chrétiens. Archives du Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian* 48 (2004), pp. 73–102 [87].

⁵⁴ See e.g. G. Nahon, “Que fue mudado su nombre. Le salut des vivants dans l’épigraphie portugaise en France,” in *Coming and Going: The Role of Hamburg in the Religious, Economic and Cultural Sephardic Network*, ed. M. Studemund-Halévy (forthcoming).

⁵⁵ For an excellent study on epigraphic evidence, see M. Preuss, *...aber die Krone des guten Namens überragt sie* (Stuttgart 2005).

family bonds.⁵⁶ Such studies would not only provide us with input about the choice of language, the use of formulaic expressions or poems in one or several languages, community members' frequent changes of locality, but also and above all about various cultural transformations and the process of acculturation that was experienced by the various communities. In this way, diverse grave forms, varying over time, as well as sepulchral ornamentation and symbols, could be studied in a comprehensive Sephardi and non-Jewish context, and which then, with the help of information concerning sepulchral topography, iconography, pictography, and epigraphy, could be more precisely dated and more comprehensively interpreted.⁵⁷

Jewish and Non-Jewish motifs

An index of the wide variety of images and motifs in Sephardi sepulchral art and its models (book illustrations, *ketubbot*,⁵⁸ amulets, ceremonial objects such as Hanukkah lamps, Kiddush cups, spice containers, lavers, *parochot*, silver trays for *pidyon ha-ben* ceremonies, faiences, and a great variety of medals commemorating the birth of a son or a daughter, etc.) is an indispensable desideratum.⁵⁹ And since we have very little knowledge about the stonemasons, who in Amsterdam and Hamburg, for example, were normally Christians,⁶⁰ and their models, a comparison with contemporary Christian sepulchral art would contribute to our understanding.

An interesting resource in this connection is Hamburg's (Lutheran) Kirchwerder cemetery, which, with the biblical representations in its medallions (Adam and Eve [figs. 10–11],⁶¹ the Crucifixion, taking down

⁵⁶ M. Studemund-Halévy and J. Poettering, "Étrangers Universels. Les réseaux séfarades à Hambourg," in *ibid.*, pp. 135–68.

⁵⁷ Weinstein, "Storied Stones of Altona."

⁵⁸ Sabar, *Ketubbah*.

⁵⁹ Ch. Benjamin, "The Sephardi Journey—Five Hundred Years of Jewish Ceremonial Objects," in *The Sephardi Journey, 1492–1992* (New York 5752 [1992]), pp. 94–135; on Curaçao see J. Maslin, "An Analysis of Jewish Ceremonial Objects of Congregation Mikve-Israel-Emanuel, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles; Dutch Silver: 1700–1800" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1980); on Hamburg see E. Schliemann, *Die Goldschmiede Hamburgs* (Hamburg 1985) [no. 307].

⁶⁰ M. Wischnitzer, *A History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds* (New York 1965).

⁶¹ See also the gravestone at the Jewish cemetery in Glückstadt; Faust and Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschlan*.

from the Cross, Christ's sepulture, the adoration of the risen Christ, the awakening of Lazarus, Judgment Day), angel's heads, rosettes at the four corners, and scrolling texts, etc., but above all the well-known "memento mori" motifs—skull and crossbones plus angels' and devils' wings, and so on, corresponds exactly to the Sephardi funereal slabs from the cemetery in Hamburg's Königstrasse. The death's head, with ears of corn growing out of its empty eye sockets, undoubtedly derives from Paul's declaration in Martin Luther's translation ("Was du säst, wird nicht lebendig, es sterbe denn. Und was du säst, ist ja nicht der Leib, der werden soll, sondern ein bloßes Korn, etwa Weizen oder der anderen eines" [1 Cor. 15:35–42]) (figs. 12–13).⁶²

A less known source of visual subjects is provided by the Portuguese export faïences found in Hamburg and Amsterdam.⁶³ The Iberian trade of the early seventeenth century brought not just pepper and other spices to Hamburg in hitherto unknown amounts, but also wines, dried and candied fruits, lemons and other southern fruits and tobacco. Eating and luxury consumption-habits changed not only among the upper classes, but also, in quick succession, among the middle classes. A compulsory auction in 1639 provides us with documentary evidence of Portuguese faïence in Portuguese households in Hamburg.⁶⁴ Although it is not always possible to attribute the findings to individual Portuguese families, signs on three vessels point to the rich Portuguese merchant Diego (Abraham) Teixeira de Sampayo.⁶⁵

The vessels imported from Portugal took account of these new needs, and, with their many visual motifs, appear to have supported these tendencies. Visual motifs on the Portuguese faïences were not indicative of any innovation or deviation from previous decorative themes on bourgeois household items, furniture, household textiles etc. Rather, what is more noteworthy is the extremely limited choice of biblical themes. These were limited to the depiction of Adam and Eve at the Fall; motifs such as depictions of St. George and St. Catherine, are

⁶² J. Grolle, *Die Predigt der Steine. Totengedächtnis in Kirchwerder* (Hamburg 1997).

⁶³ J. Baart, "Portuguese faïence 1600–1660. Een studie van bodemvonden en museumcollecties," in *Exôdo. Portugezen in Amsterdam 1600–1680*, pp. 18–24; U. Bauche, "Sefarden als Händler von Fayencen in Hamburg und Nordeuropa," in *Die Sefarden in Hamburg. Zur Geschichte einer Minderheit*, vol. 1, pp. 293–306; idem, *Lissabon-Hamburg. Fayencenimport für den Norden* (Hamburg 1996).

⁶⁴ Bauche, *Lissabon-Hamburg*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47; idem (ed.), *Vierhundert Jahre Juden in Hamburg* (Hamburg 1991), p. 41, 158 ff. (no. 73).

attested in individual cases only. Just three jugs can be found in Hamburg with the depiction of the Fall (fig. 11). Hamburg's Protestants as well as the Portuguese Jews were also interested in these Old Testament motifs, as demonstrated by the extant sepulchral monuments in their cemeteries.⁶⁶ Among the symbols and allegories that were very popular and prevalent during the age of mannerism, the choice is limited to three motifs. The one shows a pelican, feeding its young with its blood—a symbol of Christ's self-sacrifice (figs. 14–15). The pelican is treated by the psalmist as an expression of the mourning Zion, and hence in this sense it is one of the religious symbols (“I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am become as an owl of the waste places. I watch, and am become like a sparrow that is alone upon the housetop,” Psalm 102:7–8). In Eastern European Jewish sepulchral symbolism, the lone, watchful bird and mourning Zion symbolize a life cut short prematurely. The stork's and pelican's love for its children was praised by Job (39:13–17). On women's gravestones, the pelican, male or female, is depicted as a devoted mother, which rips open its breast with its beak in order to feed its young with its own blood. Among the *marranos*, the pelican is given new meaning as a “symbol of the Jewish mother,” such as on the stone of Ester Hana Aboab who died in Hamburg in 1639 (fig. 15).⁶⁷ The pelican is also prevalent in Ashkenazi Jewish ritual art, such as in a detail on a *parochet* from the synagogue in Kassel (“Pelican, feeding its young with its own blood,” 1744), on a Sabbath light from Seret (1832), or on a Chanukah lamp.⁶⁸ In northern Germany, this symbol was in frequent use from the Middle Ages onwards.⁶⁹

In Jewish as well as Christian art, the phoenix indicates the martyrdom of the believer. The phoenix, which according to Jewish tradition refuses to eat from the tree of knowledge in Paradise and does not become a burden for Noah since it consumes nothing, symbolizes the plight for the martyrdom of the Portuguese *marranos*, as well as the rebirth of Judaism and eternal life. The Book of Job praises its love for children, and for the rabbis and church fathers the phoenix symbolizes the resurrection of the deceased. The portrayal of a phoenix rising,

⁶⁶ Grunwald, *Portugiesengräber auf deutscher Erde*; Konijn, “De grafstenen van Bet Haim,” pp. 90–109; Bauche, *Lissabon-Hamburg*, pp. 44–45.

⁶⁷ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 118.

⁶⁸ R. Wischnitzer-Bernstein, *Symbole und Gestalten der jüdischen Kunst* (Berlin 1935), p. 65.

⁶⁹ Bauche, *Lissabon-Hamburg*, pp. 44–45.

rejuvenated from the flames, is also found on Jewish ritual objects such as cups and Chanukah candelabras, as well as on amulets for pregnant women. The gravestone of Semuel Hisquiau Esteves, who passed away in Hamburg in 1704, again portrays a phoenix rising from a burning nest (fig. 16).⁷⁰ A Portuguese saying is inscribed around the medallion: “*Nacemos para morrer, morremos para viver*” [We are born in order to die, and we die in order to live (Mishnah *Avot* 4, 22)]. And of course the phoenix also became a popular emblematic symbol in Jewish-Portuguese and Christian book and faience ornamentation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, on medallions and commemorative coins, as well as on the extravagantly illustrated *ketubbot* of the period. An example is its use as a vignette in the *Segunda Parte del Sedur* (fig. 17), which appeared in Amsterdam in 1612. Other Amsterdam examples are found in Daniel de la Feuille’s book *Devises et emblemes anciennes et modernes* (Amsterdam 1691), on the façade of an Amsterdam residential building (“*Ian De Witt Pelikaan*”), on the seal of the Amsterdam community Talmud Torah (“*Sello do K.K. de T.T. de Amsterdam*” [fig. 18]), on the title page of the *Novo reglamento Para à Irmandade de T.T. de ES-HAIM, publicado em 23 Yiar 5488 com licença dos senhores do Mahamad, em Amsterdam na oficina de Ishac Jeuda Leão Templo* (Amsterdam 1728), on an Amsterdam medallion,⁷¹ an Amsterdam *ketubbah* of 1821, and so on.⁷²

The heart penetrated by arrows, which is found in twelve known instances, is by far the most frequent symbol. It became nationally venerated in Spain and Portugal as an attribute of St. Theresa of Avila.⁷³ The Portuguese Jews in northwestern Europe interpreted it as the symbol of marital love, e.g. on marriage contracts. And since this motif was unknown in North European Christianity as a symbol of love, it may be justifiably concluded that there must have been an Iberian

⁷⁰ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 105.

⁷¹ J. S. da Silva Rosa, *Geschiedenis der Portugeesche Joden te Amsterdam 1593–1925* (Amsterdam 1925).

⁷² All the examples are taken from L. Mintz-Manor, “Signs and Comparisons in the Sephardi-Portuguese Jewish Kehilla in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries” [in Hebrew] (Master’s thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005), and H. den Boer, *Spanish and Portuguese Printing in the Northern Netherlands 1584–1825*, CD-ROM (Leiden 2003).

⁷³ Bauche, *Lissabon-Hamburg*, p. 45.

or Sephardi influence (figs. 19–20).⁷⁴ This popular motif is also found on numerous Sephardi gravestones in northwestern Europe.⁷⁵

The Rhetoric of Jewish Epigraphy

We have no basic studies on the rhetoric of Jewish sepulchral language in general,⁷⁶ on Sephardi sepulchral language in particular, or on their Greek-Latin, Hebrew-Arabic, Spanish-Portuguese, and Christian models.⁷⁷ Why does only Hamburg have Sephardi genealogical trees or Trees of Life (fig. 21)?⁷⁸ Why were the names on the Mendes family's genealogical tree at the Ouderkerk cemetery replaced by apples?⁷⁹ Why is the “siste, viator” motif (epitaphs addressing the passer-by; epitaphs addressing the deceased),⁸⁰ present in practically every Sephardi cemetery, almost entirely absent from Ashkenazi graves? Here are a few examples:

Hamburg, tombstone of Jacob Alvares de Vargas, d. 5383⁸¹

*Aquele que aqvi chegar
Note que pera alcansar
o sumo bem que he a gloria se do mundo
quer victoria i
saiba sofrer e callar*

Hamburg, tombstone of Ribca Mussaphia Fidalgo, d. 5548⁸²

Passante bendice sua / Memoria & imita suas Virtudes

⁷⁴ U. Bauche (ed.), *Vierhundert Jahre Juden in Hamburg*, p. 158 ff. (fig. 73).

⁷⁵ Studemund-Halévy, “Pedra e Livro”; G. Nahon, “Un espace religieux du XVIII^e siècle: Le premier cimetière des ‘Portugais’ de Bordeaux, 105 cours de la Marne 1724–1768,” in *La mort et ses représentations dans le judaïsme, Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre d’études juives de l’Université de Paris IV—Sorbonne en décembre 1989*, ed. D. Tollet (Paris 2000), pp. 243–72; idem, “Que fue mudado su nombre.”

⁷⁶ W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (Kampen 1991).

⁷⁷ Recent studies include M. Sarraga and R. Sarraga, “Hamburg’s Sephardi Hebrew Epitaphic Poems in Amsterdam Texts,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12 (2005), pp. 330–70; Studemund-Halévy, “La mort de Sara”; idem, “‘Bleib stehen, Wanderer, vor der Stele aus Marmor.’ Die Anrede an den Betrachter und den Verstorbenen auf sefardischen Grabsteinen” (forthcoming).

⁷⁸ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, pp. 124–25.

⁷⁹ L. Hagoort, *Het Beth Haim in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel. De begraafplaats van de Portugese Joden in Amsterdam 1614–1945* (Hilversum 2005), pp. 256–57.

⁸⁰ Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, pp. 49–54.

⁸¹ Studemund-Halévy, *Biographisches Lexikon der Hamburger Sefarden*.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Curaçao, tombstone of Sarah Henriquez, d. 1830⁸³
Los vivientes que aquí pasaren / y la lectura desta tomaren se desengañen / y / se acuerden que los nacidos son para morir

Barbados, tombstone of Dona Luna Burgos, d. 1756⁸⁴
Esta lossa que ves oh caminante

Barbados, tombstone of Abraham Nunes, d. 1736⁸⁵
Tu que me estas miriando

Jamaica, tombstone of Joseph Nuñez Mirande, d. 1717⁸⁶
*porque assi de mi Tumba te descias
 Moria sin aplicar tu pensamiento*

Jamaica, tombstone of Abigail Nunes Flamengo, d. 1774⁸⁷
Se procura saber o Caminhante / Quem se guarda nesta Sepoltura

Biblical Imagery

The high period of tombstone art with figured reliefs started with the Renaissance and finished with the Baroque. The Christian stonemasons found patterns for the biblical imagery scriptural scenes in Jewish and Christian illustrated Bibles, Haggadot, ceremonial objects,⁸⁸ etc., and henceforth, biblical scenes relating to the namesakes of the deceased proliferated.⁸⁹ Although we are well informed about the biblical figures that appear on Sephardi tombstones, unfortunately we do not know why as strong a woman as Miriam—who was rarely depicted in Jewish art—was not “perpetuated” on a tombstone.⁹⁰ A few examples include the following graves under stones often densely decorated with bas-relief depictions of biblical scenes echoing the life of the deceased:

⁸³ Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, p. 432.

⁸⁴ E. M. Shilstone, *Monumental Inscriptions in the Jewish Synagogue at Bridgetown Barbados with Historical Notes from 1630* (London 1956), pp. 53–54.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

⁸⁶ Barnett and Wright, *Jews of Jamaica*, p. 14.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

⁸⁸ On small synagogue furnishings and silver ceremonial artifacts such as Torah crowns, Torah finials, and even amulets for home use, often decorated with popular Jewish motifs and symbols, see Wischnitzer-Bernstein, *Symbole und Gestalten der jüdischen Kunst*; S. G. Cusin, *Art in the Jewish Tradition* (Milan 1963); Benjamin, “The Sephardi Journey.”

⁸⁹ “Baroque Jewish monuments with figured reliefs are found only in regions by the Dutch or near the free city of Hamburg” (Weinstein, “Stones of Memory,” p. 91).

⁹⁰ Studemund-Halévy, “La mort de Sara.”

Moses (*Moses with Tablets of Law*,⁹¹ *flanked by Abraham and King David*,⁹² *Moses hits the rock*⁹³);

Abraham (*Binding of Isaac*,⁹⁴ *Abraham looking to the heavens*,⁹⁵ *Abraham and the visitors*, *pact between Abraham and Abimelech*⁹⁶);

Judah;⁹⁷

Benjamin;⁹⁸

Isaac (*Binding of Isaac*,⁹⁹ *Isaac with Sara*,¹⁰⁰ *Isaac praying in field to the Almighty* [fig. 7]¹⁰¹);

Daniel (*Daniel in the lions' den* [fig. 8]¹⁰²);

David (*David playing the harp*,¹⁰³ *encounter of David and Abigail*, *King David as psalmist*, *Abigail offering gifts to David*¹⁰⁴);

Jacob (*Jacob asleep near the ladder of angels* [fig. 9],¹⁰⁵ *Jacob encounters Rachel*¹⁰⁶);

Joseph (*Joseph thrown into the pit*,¹⁰⁷ *Joseph dreaming*);

Samuel (*the prophet being awakened by the voice of the Lord*, *Samuel in the Temple*¹⁰⁸);

⁹¹ I. S. Emmanuel and S. A. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles* (Cincinnati 1970), vol. 1 [fig. 31].

⁹² Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 54.

⁹³ Faust and Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschland*, p. 19.

⁹⁴ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 37; Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 115; A. Contessa, "Représentations de la ligature d'Isaac dans l'art juif et chrétien du Moyen Âge," *Perspectives* 13 (2006), pp. 213–32.

⁹⁵ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 54.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 115; M. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean. The Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Settlements in the Caribbean and the Guianas* (Jerusalem 2002), p. 138 [Curaçao].

¹⁰⁰ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 54.

¹⁰¹ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 115; Faust and Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschland*, p. 101.

¹⁰² Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 114.

¹⁰³ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, pp. 37, 54; Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, vol. 1 [fig. 49]; Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁴ Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, fig. 49.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, figs. 34, 50, 57; Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 115; Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, pp. 37, 54.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁷ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁸ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 50.

Elijah (*Elijah in flaming chariot takes leave of Elisha, Eli and Hanna in the Temple*¹⁰⁹);

Mordechai (*Mordechai on horseback being led by Haman and flanked by bas-reliefs of Benjamin and Judah*¹¹⁰);

King Solomon (*Solomon as judge*,¹¹¹ *King Solomon meets Queen Sheba*¹¹²);

Sara (*Sara with Isaac*¹¹³);

Abigail (*Encounter of Abigail and David*);

Esther (*Esther before Ahasverus; Esther petitions Ahasverus*¹¹⁴);

Eve (*Eve and the serpent*¹¹⁵);

Hanna (*Hanna in the Temple*¹¹⁶);

Rebecca (*Rebecca giving Abraham's servant a drink at the well*,¹¹⁷ *meeting of Rebecca and Eliezer*);

Rachel (*Rachel as shepherdess*,¹¹⁸ *Rachel encounters Jacob at the well* [fig. 8],¹¹⁹ *Rachel's death*¹²⁰).

Detailed analysis of these figurative depictions is needed in order to reveal clues as to whether the backdrop to these portrayals is Jewish or Christian.

Stones and Books

On Old and New World Sephardi gravestones, we find numerous portrayals of an open book (under a crown of scholarship, the priesthood,

¹⁰⁹ Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, fig. 23; Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 41.

¹¹⁰ Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, fig. 37; Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 54.

¹¹¹ Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, fig. 49; Faust and Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschland*, p. 30; Arbell, *Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*, p. 22.

¹¹² Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 54.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, vol. 1 [fig. 11].

¹¹⁵ Faust and Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschland*, p. 18.

¹¹⁶ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 41.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

¹¹⁸ Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*, p. 115; Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, vol. 1 [fig. 50].

¹¹⁹ Weinstein, "Storied Stones of Altona."

¹²⁰ Vega, *Het Beth Haim van Ouderkerk*, p. 50; Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, vol. 1 [fig. 50].

and a good name), whose pages often bear a biblical quotation or genealogical data; examples of this are on the recently restored tombstone of Hamburg rabbi and philologist David Cohen de Lara, or the *ohel* of rabbi, teacher, and book collector Semuel Abas.¹²¹ Whilst these portrayals of a book point first and foremost to the importance and profession of the deceased (rabbi, scholar, etc.), they give the onlooker an obvious indication that these scholars must also have been the owners of more or less large-scale libraries. And what could be more obvious than the assumption that the models for images and motifs that we find on Sephardi gravestones are to be found in these Jewish or non-Jewish books.

Sephardi rabbis' and scholars' libraries, which from the mid 1700s onwards were put together as book-collecting enterprises, provide us with a fascinating picture of Sephardi scholars' erudition, but also of the cultural climate within the Sephardi communities to which these scholars belonged.¹²² Thus Josef Solomon Delmedigo, who lived for a while in Hamburg as well as in Glückstadt, had more than four thousand books, which he had managed to acquire on his numerous voyages throughout Europe. Hamburg scholars such as Semuel da Silva, Semuel Abas, Binyamin Mussaphia Fidalgo and Abraham Meldola, as well as Amsterdam rabbis Menasseh ben Israel, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, Moses Raphael de Aguilar, and David Nunes Torres¹²³ all possessed extensive libraries.¹²⁴ They contained not only theological and philosophical works, tomes on mathematics, astronomy, geography, history, and medicine, but also the Greek and Latin classics and the literature of Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France.¹²⁵

With intensive exchanges between the Sephardi communities, as well as the Jewish books from the Netherlands that circulated in these com-

¹²¹ Studemund-Halévy, "Pedra e Livro," pp. 251–73; Studemund-Halévy and Zürn, *Zerstört die Erinnerung nicht*.

¹²² M. Studemund-Halévy, "Codices Gentium. Semuel de Isaac Abas, coleccionista de libros hamburgués," in *Familia, Religión y Negocio*, pp. 287–319; idem, "Plaisirs de bibliophiles, la bibliothèque rabbinique de Semuel de Isaac Abas (Hambourg)," in *Romanistik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (forthcoming).

¹²³ Y. Kaplan, *Circulation of Books and Ideas in the Western Sephardi Diaspora: The Collection of David Nunes Torres and Its Historical Significance* (Hamburg 2005, unpublished paper).

¹²⁴ Y. Kaplan, "El perfil cultural de tres rabinos sefardíes a través del análisis de sus bibliotecas," in *Familia, Religión y Negocio*, pp. 269–86; idem, "The Libraries of Three Sephardi Rabbis in Early Modern Western Europe" [in Hebrew], in *Libraries and Book Collections*, ed. Y. Kaplan and Moshe Sluhovsky, (Jerusalem 2006), pp. 225–60.

¹²⁵ Studemund-Halévy, "Codices Gentium"; idem, "Plaisirs de bibliophiles."

munities, it was inevitable that sepulchral art and sepulchral language gradually became standardized. Both artists and clients found inspiration for artistic motifs in the community libraries, as well as in those of wealthy community members. In addition, artists and poets worked not only for their home community, but also on commission for members of other communities. Artists, whether Christian or Jewish, took a considerable proportion of their visual motifs from these illustrated books. True, very few biblical books enjoyed visual ornamentation, which was largely confined to the first books of the Pentateuch (Genesis and Exodus), illustrations of the story of Esther, and individual visual subjects such as King David singing psalms and playing the harp or King Solomon at prayer. Through their superb illustrations for the great Lutheran and Catholic editions of the Bible, Christian artists such as Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/98–1553), Albrecht Dürer, and Lucas Cranach the Younger, Tobias Stimmer (1539–1584) and Jost Amman (1539–1591) provided welcome copy that was subsequently adopted by Christian and Jewish copyists and emulators. Thus numerous Holbein pictures were used in the *Tam ve-Yashar* book of ethics published in 1674 and 1718, as were Matthaeus Merian's copperplate engravings in the Amsterdam Haggadah editions of 1695 and 1712, respectively.¹²⁶ Whatever was used to illustrate books was immediately transferred to Jewish ceremonial objects and sepulchral decoration.

Some of the most popular motifs include architectural elements such as columned gates and twisted columns decorated with leafy grapevines and hanging grape bunches, and which cite Yachin and Boaz, the two columns that flanked the entrance to the Temple (1 Kings 7:15–22). A beautiful example is the richly ornamented grave of the wife of Aron Benveniste, who passed away on 24 Tevet 5500 (January 24, 1740): two beautiful, twisted columns, one on each side, rise from two pedestals completely surrounded by grapevines and bunches of grapes connected on top by an arch. In the arch, two grieving, graceful ladies are holding an hourglass.¹²⁷ The “two-column” motif was a popular motif on Jewish ceremonial objects such as *parochot*, as well as in *ketubbot* and on

¹²⁶ R. Wischnitzer-Bernstein, “Von der Holbeinbibel zur Amsterdamer Haggadah,” in *MGWJ* 75 (1931), pp. 269–86.

¹²⁷ Faust and Studemund-Halévy, *Betahaim. Sefardische Gräber in Norddeutschland*, p. 65.

the title-page of Hebrew illustrated manuscripts.¹²⁸ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this two-column motif was very popular in both Christian and Jewish book decoration.¹²⁹ The Hebrew term for a title page is “gate,” instantly conjuring up the image of a gate or gateway. This association was used by Jewish book designers, who made every effort to elaborate on it. In early books, particularly those printed in Italy, the typical architectural depiction in these pages consisted of a gate, which framed the book’s title, crowned by an inscription set within the gate’s lintel, arch, or gable: “This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter into it.” In sixteenth-century Hebrew letterpress printing, this motif adorns innumerable title pages. The following are just a few examples: *Sefer Torat ha-Olah* by Moses ben Israel Isserles (Prague 1570), *Sefer ha-Agudah* by Alexander Suslin ha-Kohen (Cracow 1571), *Sefer Derashot al ha-Torah* by Joshua ibn Shuaib (Cracow 1673/74), *She’elot le-Hakham* by Saul ha-Kohen Ashkenazi (Venice 1574), *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Mantua 1556), or *Sefer Reshit Hokmah* by Elijah ben Moses de Vidas (Venice 1579).¹³⁰ The two-column motif was also very popular with the Amsterdam printers: *Tratado del temor divino* by David Cohen de Lara (Amsterdam 1633), *Thesowro dos Dinim* by Menasseh ben Israel (Amsterdam 1645), *Elogios que zelosos dedicaron a la felice memoria de Abraham Nunez Bernal* (Amsterdam 1645), *Biblia en lengua española* (Amsterdam 1661), *Orden de los cinco ayunos* (Amsterdam 1684), *Orden de Ros-asana y Kipur* (Amsterdam 1684), *Livro da Gramatica hebrayca & Chaldayca* (Amsterdam 1689), etc.¹³¹

Of all the local communities, it was the Amsterdam Sephardim who, at their literary academies, read and discussed the latest works in Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Hebrew.¹³² Thus the Sephardi poetess Isabel, alias Rebecca Correa, a member of the *Los Sitibundos* academy, together with Isabella Enriques, is considered the translator of the first Spanish translation of *Pastor Fido* of Battista Guarini in the Netherlands.¹³³ It is also perhaps to *Pastor Fido* that we can trace the roots of the portrayal

¹²⁸ Wischnitzer-Bernstein, “Von der Holbeinbibel zur Amsterdamer Haggadah”; Narkiss, *Illustrations of the Amsterdam Haggadah*.

¹²⁹ B. Yaniv, “The Origins of the ‘Two-Column Motif’ in European Art,” *Jewish Art* 15 (1989), pp. 26–43.

¹³⁰ All the examples are taken from M. J. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book. An Abridged Thesaurus*, 2 vols. (Leiden 2004).

¹³¹ All examples are taken from den Boer, *Spanish and Portuguese Printing*.

¹³² Idem, *La literatura sefardí de Amsterdam* (Alcalá de Henares 1996).

¹³³ M. Bitton, *Poétesses et lettrées juives. Une mémoire éclipse* (Paris 1999).

of Rachel as a shepherdess on a Hamburg tombstone, which offers the surprised cemetery visitor a charming décolleté (figs. 22–24).¹³⁴

It can therefore be seen how Christian-Jewish book and sacral art, as well as the literature of antiquity, the Renaissance and the Baroque, provided inspiration for Sephardi sepulchral art, an art that continues to amaze us; systematic research on the subject has still to be undertaken.

¹³⁴ Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, fig. 21.