

ESSAI HISTORIQUE

The Jewish Diaspora in the America's

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Biography of Peter van Dun:

Born in The Hague (Netherlands) 18 April 1936,
Studied architecture at Delft University of Technology,
Worked in several functions in the Netherlands Department for Conservation,
Division of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science since 1965.
Since retirement in 2001, active in the international conservation scene through
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Netherlands Management Cooperation Programme (NMCP) and ICOMOS,
ICOMOS member since 1985 and since January 2006 chairman of the ICOMOS
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Abstract

In the beginning of the 16th century Jews from Spain (and later on from Portugal) were forced by the 'Holy Office of the Inquisition' to become Christian and abandon their Judaism. Due to the expansion of the non-Iberian powers in the America's by England, France and the Netherlands, many of the Iberian Jewish refugees fled to opportunities in the New World. The Netherlands started settlements in Brazil and on the Guyana reef on the so-called Wild Coast of South America. Jews from Portugal, especially, saw a new future in these regions (being Dutch territories, in which the Jews experienced a liberal attitude) and settled there.

With the reoccupation of Brazil by the Portuguese in 1654 the Jews left. Since they were considered as experienced planters and traders in tropical agriculture they were heartily welcomed by other governing authorities including Suriname. The Jews were seen as an important economic impulse in the low populated areas of the interior of the region. The Jews were allowed to organize their own administration; to have their own courts, schools, cemeteries; build their synagogues; and to worship on the Saturday (Sabbath). Production in the plantations along the Surinam River – mostly sugar - formed the economic basis of which the necessary labour force was supplied by slaves.

At the end of the seventeenth century the economic interest of the Jews started to move downstream along the Suriname River to Paramaribo and to combine forces with the Dutch settlers. Jodensavanne started to decline and became deserted. A fire of 1832 finished of the existing town. the synagogue was repaired. The last service was held in 1869, where after the building was left and decline started. The site became overgrown by bush and not until the beginning of the Second World War, the first cleaning and identification actions were undertaken.

Financed by the Jewish community of New York, today Jodensavanne has again been 'cleaned' from overgrowth and provided with explanatory signs. Jodensavanne was placed on the Tentative List of the World Heritage List in 1997 by the Surinam Government. The nomination file is almost completed; a management plan is being made up. The back up might not be the specific architecture (all that rests are archaeological remains) but the remembrance of the start of the Jewish Diaspora in the America's.

HISTORY

The flight from Europe.

In the fifteenth century large parts of Spain were still dominated by Arabs and large cities, especially the cities of Sevilla and Barcelona contained large populations of Jews. In order to strengthen and maintain the Catholic Orthodoxy, in 1478 the Spanish Inquisition was founded by the 'Reyos Católicos'. Their aim was to cast out the Jews and Muslims and oppress Protestantism.

Jews were forced to become Christian and abandon their Judaism. Although many of them did, they were more or less seen as outcasts of the Spanish society. They had no other possibility than to move out of the country. In North Western Europe (especially in the Northern part of the Low Countries – which became acknowledged as the independent Republic of the Seven United Netherlands in 1648 - Protestantism had led to a more liberal attitude to religion (although public appearance of Roman Catholic elements were forbidden) Many Spanish and Portuguese Jews moved out the North in order to start a new live. The existing Jewish community in Amsterdam was rather orthodox and the Iberian Jews had difficulties adopting this orthodoxy. With the expansion of the non-Iberian powers in the America's a more liberal attitude came to development (especial in the Netherlands' territories); the 'New World' became a popular port of refuge for many of the Iberian Jews. The Netherlands founded settlements in Brazil and on the Guyana reef on the so-called Wild Coast of South America. Jews from Portugal, especially, saw a new future in these regions and settled there.

JODENSAVANNE

With the reoccupation of Brazil by the Portuguese in 1654 the Jews were again confronted with the effects of the inquisition and had to decide to flee (again) Over the Amazon river, along the South American coast they arrived with all their possessions (including slaves) in Cayenne (which was in Dutch possession in those days) But when the French took over in 1664 the Jews left for Suriname (which was in British possession in those days) Since they were seen as experienced planters and traders in tropical agriculture they were seen as an important economic impulse in the low populated areas of the interior of the region. The Jews were allowed to organize their own administration; to have their own courts, schools, cemeteries; build their synagogues; and to worship on the Saturday (Sabbath). Production in the plantations along the Surinam River formed the

economic basis of which the necessary labour force was supplied by slaves.

When Suriname came under Dutch rule in 1667 the privileges were continued, but the Jewish plantations, being laid out on relative infertile soil of the rain forest, began to experience competition from Dutch settlers in the region, who with their knowledge of water management, started to exploit the low situated, but more fertile coastal region along the Comewijne river (and also along the coast of today's Guyana)

DESCRIPTION

Today's Jodensavanne holds the remains of a Jewish town, founded in the seventeenth century. The town centre consisted of a nine-square grid. The middle rectangle of the grid measured 135 by 75 m. In the middle of this plaza like rectangle stood the synagogue, Beracha Ve Shalom (Blessing and Peace), erected in 1685. Visible are the ruins of the (brick) synagogue and the foundations of several houses. Along the perimeter of the rectilinear synagogue plaza ran a fence with entry gates at each of the four sides' midpoints, north, south, east and west. Only a few elements of the village are to be seen, but earlier archaeological survey has shown parts of brick foundations of urban structures. The (ruin of) the synagogue represents the first synagogue of architectural significance in the New World. Also visible are the aforementioned four gates and building foundations of 'ordinary' houses. In the Northern part of the settlement remaining brick foundations most likely represent the military stronghold 'Post Jodensavanne' (later on mentioned as 'Post Gelderland') at the beginning of the defence line 'Cordon Pad'. The defence line runs all the way to the Atlantic Ocean and was designated to protect the plantations from Maroon (runaway slaves) attacks.

The area of Jodensavanne harbours two Jewish cemeteries, together holding approximately seven hundred gravestones spanning approximately 250 years of Jewish burial. On the Northeast site of the village, where the Sephardic cemetery Beth Haim is situated and measures 50 x 110 meters across a gently sloped site, there are also remains of the Burial House. The remaining 450 graves of the Beth Haim are of marble and bluestone tombstones dating from the period between 1685 and 1873. Most of the texts are in Portuguese and Hebrew, but Dutch is also found.

The Creole Cemetery, about 300 m east of the cemetery Beth Haim, is the resting place for free people of African origin. Remnant grave markers at this cemetery are stylistically diverse and represent a rare example of an African America cemetery with burials as early as the mid nineteenth century. 1,2 km distance from Jodensavanne upstream along the Surinam River another Jewish burial ground, called Cassipora Cemetery. There 216 remaining gravestones from the years 1666 – 1873 are found. The stones are believed to be in their original orientation. The majority of the remaining gravestones are placed in family groups, with child graves placed at the feet of their parents.

From the burial registers of the community it is known that the 216 gravestones remaining at the Cassipora Creek Cemetery and the 462 at the

Jodensavanne Cemetery represent only a portion of burials. Beyond those remaining, many burials at the cemeteries were marked by grave markers of temporal materials that leave no visible trace.

Plantation agriculture, including sugar, coffee, cacao and letter wood, surrounded and provided the livelihood for Jodensavanne. Today secondary forest growth disguises the evidence of this once thriving agriculturally community. During the eighteenth century the economic interest of the Jews started to move downstream along the Suriname River to the colonial city of Paramaribo where they not only combined forces with the Dutch settlers but also developed a strong sugar trade. On behalf of which Jews settled in other Caribbean regions. Among others to Willemstad on Curaçao with its accessible natural and harbour - which still has the oldest functioning Synagogue in the Caribbean and St. Eustatius (Statia) which developed a vivid trade with the in revolt being young United States

Jodensavanne started to decline and became deserted. A fire of 1832 finished of the existing town, the synagogue was repaired. The last service was held in 1869, where after the building was left and fell into disrepair. The site became overgrown by scrub and not until the beginning of the Second World War, when among others Dutch Nazis from the Netherlands East Indies were imprisoned at Jodensavanne, the first cleaning and identification actions were undertaken.

The Jewish community of Suriname today is rather small. Did they use two synagogues in Paramaribo in the beginning of the twentieth century – a Portuguese-Israeli and a German-Israeli synagogue, nowadays only the first mentioned is in service? The building of German-Israeli synagogue is still present, but nowadays it is rented to an operator of an internet café. The original interior was shipped to Jerusalem to be exposed in a museum.

TODAY'S VISION

Jodensavanne was placed on the Tentative List of the World Heritage List in 1997 by the Surinam Government. The nomination file is already accepted, a management plan is being made up. Altogether it will be send to the UNESCO in 2009. The back up might not be the specific architecture (all that rests are archaeological remains) but the remembrance of the start of the Jewish Diaspora in the America's.

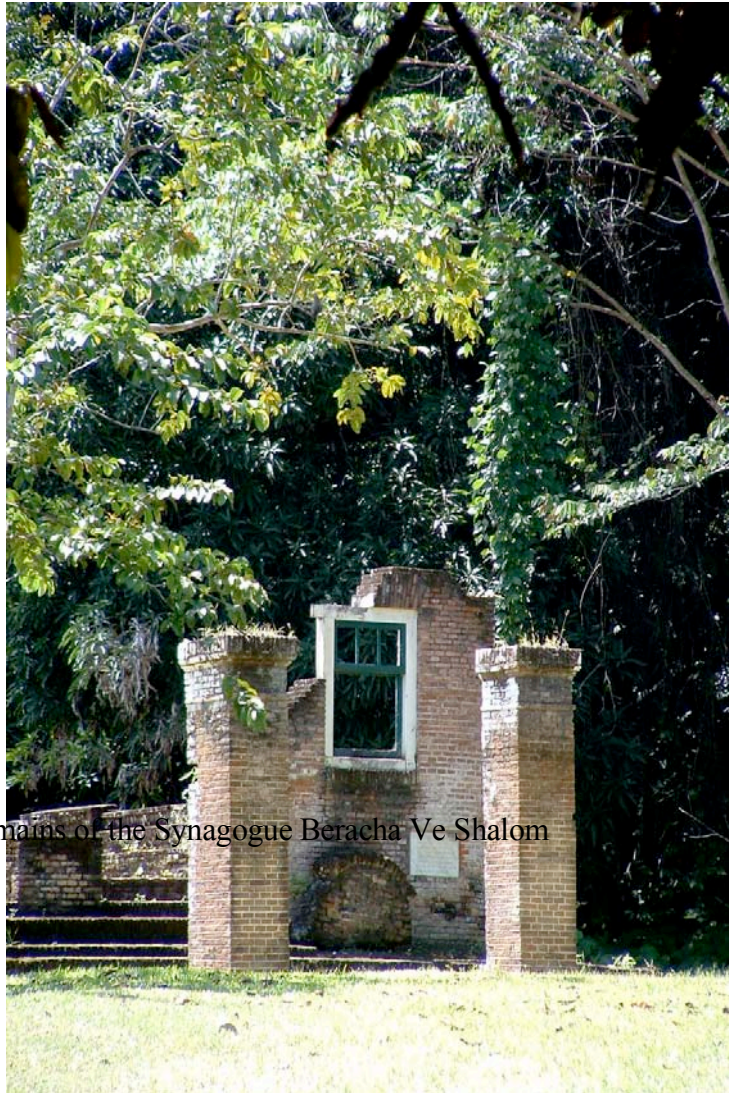
Motives are that Jodensavanne's significance is not its uniqueness or isolated success, it represents Jewish contribution to shaping the political, social and economic patterns in the New World and that the New World deeply influenced the destiny, as well as the character, of the Jewish Nation, not only in liberal North America, but also in Central and South America and on the Caribbean islands.

The settlement of Jodensavanne is the first permanent and only autonomous Jewish settlement in the Western Hemisphere. Together with the Jewish community of Curaçao, Jodensavanne influenced the Jewish participation in the so-called Atlantic economic development.

Jodensavanne's activities were primarily focused on agricultural production and are initiated a profitable cultivation of sugarcane and the production of sugar which, combined with the Dutch knowledge on water man-

agement in a later phase, created an impressive cultural landscape along the Atlantic coast from Eastern Suriname throughout today's Guyana.

Financed by the Jewish community of New York, Jodensavanne has again been 'cleaned' from overgrowth and provided with explanatory signs. Also a landing stage for small tourist boats was build.



Remains of the Synagogue Beracha Ve Shalom

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