THE DANISH JEWISH MUSEUM

ARRIVALS

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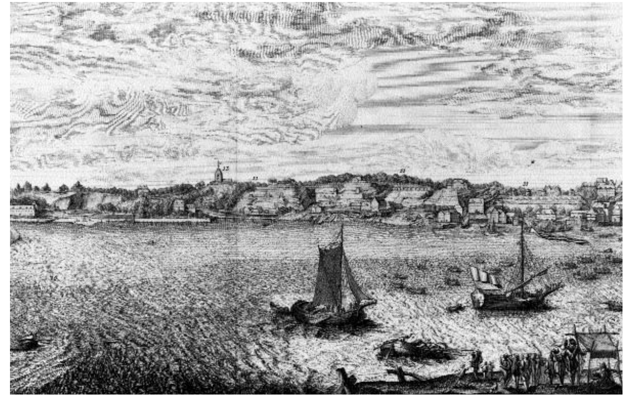
ARRIVALS

The tracks lead back to Spain, Germany,
Poland, and Russia and many other countries.
The Jewish immigrants in Denmark came
from a wide variety of backgrounds,
and have created very different lives
for themselves here.

Every person's story is unique, but there are also patterns that are common to all European Jews


The Royal Library, Copenhagen

Altona was the southern frontier of Denmark until 1864. Many jews passed through this city en route to Denmark.

ON THE MOVE

Jewish history is full of departures, migrations and new beginnings. Jews have left many countries to start a new life somewhere else after being driven away from their homes, but also in order to pursue better careers or business opportunities in other countries.

The Danish Jews belong to not one but many groups with different backgrounds. Families and individuals have immigrated to Denmark for approximately 400 years, sometimes few at a time or individually, other times in waves. Some chose Denmark as their destination, others ended up here by chance. Every person's story is unique, but there are also patterns shared by all European Jews.

HAMBURG, ALTONA, GLÜCKSTADT

When Christian IV founded the city of Glückstadt in 1616, he saw the Sephardic Jews as an instrument for boosting the city's trade and growth. His invitation for Jews to settle in Glückstadt was only valid for Sephardic Jews, who were generally well-established merchants with a broad network of Jewish families in several countries. In the 1620s and 1630s, thirty Sephardic families from Amsterdam, France, Hamburg and Sale in North Africa became part of the Jewish community in Glückstadt.

The Sephardic Jews were under the direct protection of the King, and many of them worked at or with the royal court. But in the long run, possibilities in Denmark could not satisfy the ambitions of Sephardic Jews, who in time involved themselves elsewhere.

Sephardic and Ashkenazi

Until the sixteenth century, most Jews lived in the Middle East and North Africa, but there have been Jewish communities in Europe since the early Middle Ages. Many families wandered north from Italy, and over the centuries they created a separate Jewish culture in Europe, known as *Ashkenazi*. Ashkenaz is the traditional Jewish name for Northern Europe.

In Spain and Portugal, which were part of the Arab caliphate in the middle Ages, Jewish culture developed in close contact with the Spanish-Arab culture. This Jewish culture is known as *Sephardic*, from the traditional Jewish name for Spain, Sefarad. When Spain became part of Christian Europe, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews came into closer contact with one another, but the two groups have maintained separate cultures.

Ladino

The Sephardic families continued to speak Jewish Spanish, also known as Ladino or Judezmo, after arriving in their new countries. These languages disappeared from Denmark with the Sephardic Jews.

The Royal Library, Copenhagen

Salomon de Meza descended from a Sephardi family that had immigrated in the 18th century. He converted to Christianity in order to become a doctor.

PROVINCIAL JEWS

by Merete Christensen

The community in Randers had its high point at the middle of the nineteenth century, although it never had more than 200 members. These members, however, have been immortalised, both in a modest corpus of historical literature and through far deeper accounts in memoirs and fiction. The poet Henrik Pontoppidan (1857-1943), who was raised in Randers, is especially noteworthy. He writes in his memoirs (*Undervejs til mig selv* – "En route to myself", 1943) about the period after the synagogue was closed down: But in the empty prayer house, the "Eternal lamp" burned, now as before, day and night in front of the cabinet with the holy Torah scrolls. The few remaining families took turns letting themselves in every Friday to refill the lamp with oil, perhaps the oldest symbol of eternal prayer.

Anker Nielsen

The siblings John og Erica Hartogsohn from Randers, 1918.

The Royal Library, Copenhagen

Horse Dealer Wulf Nathansen from Randers.

The Jews were an alien element and a separate nation, and could therefore only be let into the country if they could be of immediate use

Paper cutting of a Jewish family from Randers.

MODERATED EXPECTATIONS

Although the Danish state was not able to offer trade at the levels that capital-heavy Sephardic Jews could handle, industrious merchants were still in demand, and were welcome regardless of their family names. Ashkenazi Jews therefore started immigrating to Denmark.

When Fredericia was founded in 1682, the King offered religious freedom to new citizens, in order to boost the city's growth. Several Jewish families moved to Fredericia, where they were not charged the usual fee of 1,000 Danish Rigsdaler for a residence permit. Several other cities, such as Nakskov, Horsens, Randers, Ålborg, Fåborg, Assens and Odense, acquired Jewish communities of varying sizes.

From 1700 to 1780, Jews immigrated to Denmark at an average rate of two Jews per year. The entrance ticket to Danish society was fortune, industriousness and a good reputation. Jews were not admitted to the existing craft guilds before 1788, and were not allowed to own land. They therefore worked in sectors that were so new they had not been monopolised yet, or that were not subject to existing craft or trade regulations. Examples of Jewish professions are: tobacco spinning, garment professions such as cotton printing, finance, and trading in coffee, tea, chocolate, hides and fur, cattle and horses, ribbons and second-hand clothing.

Danish Jewish family trees are rich in family members from other countries

Denmark was no more restrictive than other European countries, but followed the pragmatism of the time: the Jews were an alien element and a separate nation, and could therefore only be allowed into the country if they would be of immediate use. Although Jews were allowed to practise their religion, they had to do it secretly, to avoid public outrage.

Prejudices against Jews abounded, and it was held that especially poor Jews "are harmful to the population and encourage thievery and fraud". Danish Jews were also against an influx of poor Jews to Denmark, because they would have to bear the burden, since the state did not give poor relief to Jews. Notwithstanding, at least half of the 380 Jewish families in Copenhagen were poor at the time of the 1787 census.

The marriage contract safeguards the economic rights of the woman.

Jewish autonomy until modern times

Historically speaking, it is not long since the Jews were recognised as citizens with equal rights. Until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jews everywhere lived as "tolerated" minorities. The price for being a religious and ethnic minority was systematic discrimination throughout the centuries.

In Islamic countries, Omar's Law, in return for observing certain laws and paying an extra tax, guaranteed Jews protection and tolerance. In Europe, the representatives of the Jewish communities negotiated with noblemen, kings and clerics for so-called *privileges*, which gave them the right to settle – again typically in exchange for paying taxes.

Many Jewish communities in the Orient and Europe had inner autonomy with their own judicial system, schools, burial grounds, poor help, political leadership, civil servants and institutions such as synagogues and ritual baths. Cases concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance were settled within the community itself. This gave great freedom for upholding Jewish culture. The first Jews in Denmark are referred to in official documents as members "of the Jewish nation", and they established traditional Jewish societies complete with synagogue, school and burial ground.

INDIVIDUAL IMMIGRATION

Jewish immigrants' connections with families and friends in other countries allowed them to exchange relatives in need of professional training. This was absolutely necessary as long as Jews were not allowed to become apprenticed to Danish craftsmen or attend Danish universities. In this way, individual immigration took place, but also emigration. Marriage was another trigger of migration. This is obvious from Danish Jewish family trees, which are rich in family members from other countries.

With the act of 1814, which almost brought equality between Danish Jews and other Danes, the Jewish minority's possibilities for moving deeper into Gentile society, speak Danish and attend educational institutions were significantly expanded. Within a few decades, many of the new "citizens of the Mosaic faith" moved up in society to create a new Jewish bourgeoisie, which had its own educational ideals. Some were baptised, wishing to free themselves of their status as Jews, but most were happy with their new status as Danish Jewish upper class citizens.

The shoe was used in a special ritual, through which the brother of a dead man was absolved from marrying his brother's widow.

The fear of the ghetto

”No one who has wandered about in the Jewish quarters of Hamburg or London ever forgets their unspeakable squalor, which is, however, marked by Oriental picturesque ness. The Ghettos are a world of their own, where Old Testament mysticism enters into a strange fusion with the contemporary struggle for existence. Copenhagen is well on its way to getting such a ghetto”, wrote the magazine Hjemmet in 1915. A colourful reportage displayed the miserable conditions and exotic environment of Eastern European immigrants in Copenhagen. This alien image of Jewish culture was not what the integrated Jewish bourgeoisie wanted the Danes to see.

The Danish Jews sympathised with these Jews, who had fled from persecution and pogroms, but they were also worried about how they might influence the Danes' attitude towards Jews. Moreover, the Jewish Community was spending a large amount of money on poor help. The Danish Jews had arranged collections and charitable work since 1905, among other things through the Russia Committee and the Jewish Nurses' Association, and the poorest refugees were supported with 2-4 Kroner per week. The chairman of the community, Isak Glückstadt, argued for limiting the number of accepted refugees, and wanted to see as many Russians as possible sent on to America. But important persons within the community such as Professor David Simonsen and Chief Rabbi Schornstein maintained that the Danish Jews were obligated to help.

The Royal Library, Copenhagen

At the turn of the twentieth century, Vognmagergade formed part of the Jewish working class neighbourhood in Copenhagen.

Toynbee-Hall - a cultural centre for Jewish immigrants, 1912-15.

THE YIDDISH IMMIGRATION WAVE

This well-established Danish Jewish community met a new wave of Jewish immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century. Destitution, discrimination and pogroms drove the Eastern European Jews to Western Europe and America in search of a new life. Most of them never imagined ending up in Denmark, but approximately 3,000 Jews did not get any further than to Copenhagen, most of them due to insufficient funds for reaching the United States. The majority of these immigrants were poor labourers, and few were able to afford living anywhere but in the worst parts of Copenhagen, such as the Adelgade-Borgergade neighbourhood, where they worked long hours in sewing rooms and workshops, getting paid less than their colleagues. The immigrants brought Yiddish language and culture to the neighbourhood.

The old Jewish bourgeoisie of Copenhagen were worried about how this new influx of alien Jewish culture would affect the Danes' views on Jews. They were afraid that dormant anti-Semitism would awake in Denmark. It was no advantage that many of the Russian Jews were organised Socialists or Zionists – or strictly orthodox. These three very different groups all stuck out compared to the highly integrated and often completely assimilated Danish Jews.

The cultural differences still persist, but have diminished considerably over the decades. But marriage between people from the two groups was unheard of for a long time.

PASSING THROUGH

Danish immigration policies in the 1930s were highly restrictive towards German refugees. It is assessed that approximately 4,500 Jewish refugees passed through Denmark from 1933 to 1939. Temporary residence, however, was still possible, and it was systematised in Denmark by *The Committee for Jewish Agricultural Apprentices*.

After the Nazi rise to power in 1933, a voluntary federation of large German-Jewish organisations was formed. Among these was *Hechaluz*, a Zionist-socialist youth movement founded in Russia during the First World War. Its purpose was to provide young Jews with a theoretical and practical education in the areas of agriculture, gardening and craftsmanship. These skills were seen as essential for cultivating the land of Palestine.

Denmark was suited to this purpose due to its large amount of agricultural land, and a committee was founded by a number of leaders from the Danish Jewish community to help young Jews get into the country to obtain an agricultural education. This was only possible with Danish temporary residence permits and British certificates allowing future immigration to Palestine.

Approximately 1,500 young German Jews came to Denmark from Germany in the 1930s, and many of them went on to Palestine. About 300 Jewish children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen also made it to Denmark in 1939 through a help programme managed by Hechaluz, but the Second World War and the German occupation of Denmark put an end to all plans to travel on to Palestine. The young German Jews were difficult to reach with warnings in October 1943, but many of them were still able to escape to Sweden. However, several of them were arrested and deported with the Danish Jews to Theresienstadt.

In the latest decades,
the Jewish immigration to Denmark
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from almost all over the world

THE POLES

In the 1970s, approximately 3,000 Polish Jewish refugees arrived in Copenhagen. They came from a communist, anti-religious, but – at least officially – ethnically egalitarian society, and many of them had gone to Jewish schools where they were taught in Yiddish and had studied Jewish literature. Like the Eastern European refugees before them, the Polish Jews experienced the Jews established in Denmark as belonging to a different culture. The Polish Jews have their own separate community with their own associations.

In the latest decades, the Jewish immigration to Denmark has been gradual and has come from almost all over the world, but the largest Jewish immigrant groups are Israelis and American Jews, who have created their own associations and communities. Others have come from places as diverse as South Africa, Sweden, Iceland and Zimbabwe.

Yiddish

Yiddish is spoken by the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe. It is a mix of medieval German and loan words from Slavic languages and Hebrew. A few Jews in Denmark speak Yiddish, but it is not a living language here.

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