

Dan Michman (ed.), *Emotions, Imaginations, Perceptions, Egos, Characteristics: Egodocuments in Dutch Jewish History* (Amsterdam: Amphora Books, 2021, 251 pp., ISBN 9789064461545).

The present collection of nine articles in the volume *Emotions, Imaginations, Perceptions, Egos, Characteristics: Egodocuments in Dutch Jewish History* is a welcomed contribution to the field of the study of personal, or rather, private, writing. It is the first collection to tackle the subject of egodocuments of Jewish people in the Netherlands, starting with the eighteenth century and ending with the twenty-first century. The book is divided into three parts. The volume opens with a methodological introduction by Dan Michman, the volume's editor. Part two is dedicated to egodocuments serving for the study of the Dutch Jewish community, from 1721 till 1974. The third part focuses on emotions as seen in egodocuments and the way they can be incorporated into research on the Holocaust.

*Emotions, Imaginations, Perceptions, Egos, Characteristics* opens with an introduction by Michman, head of the Centre for Research on Dutch Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in which he shortly outlines the history of the Centre. He furthermore provides a very brief overview of the concept of egodocuments – a term first coined by the Dutch Jewish scholar Jacques Presser in the 1950s – as used throughout the book. Concise summaries of all the papers in the volume are closing the introduction. A more detailed discussion on egodocuments and their importance in the historical research continues in the first chapter of the first part, written by Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, two of the most influential and important Dutch scholars of this concept. Following Presser, they include autobiographies, memoirs and diaries within the definition of egodocuments. What is important in their contribution is the way in which both authors engage with the figure of Presser himself. They specifically give close attention to his background as a historian, as a Jew and as a Holocaust survivor, and how his own concept of egodocuments is intertwined with his fate.

Baggerman and Dekker also outline the progression in the appearance of Jewish egodocuments in the Dutch Republic. The authors rightfully point out that until the nineteenth century there were very few of them in comparison with their Dutch counterparts, and that these documents have not yet been sufficiently explored.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this volume contains only one contribution on an early modern Jewish egodocument, Chapter 3, written by Tehilah van Luit. In her article, she analyses the court records related to the Redhead Gang in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. This was a group of Jewish criminals operating in the provinces of Gelderland and

Overijssel in the 1710s and early 1720s. The author proposes to include the clerk-written testimonies of the gang members from the criminal process against them in 1726-1727 within the definition of egodocuments. Yet, to what extent such court records, written down by juridical clerks, can be considered egodocuments is a matter of debate.<sup>2</sup>

The second chapter of the first part, authored by Annemiek Gringold, is dedicated to the role that egodocuments play in shaping museum exhibitions and the importance of context in the presentation of such sources to the broader and often unaware public. Van Luit's discussion of the aforementioned criminal records is followed by Irene Zwiep's take on academic egos as seen through inaugural lectures of Jewish and non-Jewish academics at the beginnings of the Jewish Studies in the post-war Netherlands. She relates to these lectures as 'intellectual egodocuments'. Even though these contain the particle 'I' or the academic 'We', one might wonder whether public lectures can be classified as egodocuments as the degree of personal reflection in it is debatable. The third chapter of the second part is written by the late Evelien Gans, who examines the book *Brief aan mijn moeder* (Letter to My Mother, 1974) by Dutch journalist Ischa Meijer, which is a mix between historical reality and an account of the author's personal feelings. It is followed by a contribution of David Wertheim, director of the Menasseh Ben Israel Institute in the Netherlands, who concentrates on the problematics of egodocuments written by non-Jews posing as Jews, in particular in relation to the Holocaust.

Part three delves into the emotions and perceptions on the Holocaust and the post-war years, as seen in egodocuments. What is interesting in this part is that two contributions broaden the concept of egodocuments to include oral histories and written interviews: Selma Leydesdorff's chapter focuses on her interviews with first and second generation of Sobibor survivors to document their personal experience and feelings in relation to Holocaust. The late Manfred Gerstenfeld explores interviews with young Zionists in the Netherlands after the Second World War. The final chapter of

1 Here I would like to point to my own article on Jewish egodocuments of Amsterdam, which appeared earlier this year, while I was unaware of the preparation of this volume, and contains discussion of three egodocuments written by Jews of Amsterdam: Michaël Green, 'Privacy in Jewish Egodocuments of Amsterdam (1600-1830)', in: Michael Green, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, and Mette Birkedal Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy: Sources and Approaches*. Intersections

78 (Brill 2022) 213-242. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004153073\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004153073_011).

2 For a similar take on juridical records, I recommend to check the chapter by Mathieu Laflamme, 'Entering the Bedroom through the Judicial Archives: Sexual Intimacy in Eighteenth-Century Toulouse', in: Green, Nørgaard, and Birkedal Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 194-212. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004153073\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004153073_010).

this part and of the volume as a whole, written by Reina Rutlinger-Reiner, zooms in on the correspondence left by her late mother in which the topic of the Holocaust comes to the fore.

In conclusion, the volume has important strengths. Of particular interest is the examination of the concept of egodocuments and its potential to grow to include more types of historical sources. Most important, Dutch Jewish egodocuments now receive the attention they deserve. Although separate analyses of them have been previously conducted, this volume allows to trace developments and changes of this type of sources, as well as contributes a new dimension into the lives of the Dutch Jews. Unfortunately, the book does not include any debate on the sources of the nineteenth century, which would bridge the discussion of the one and only early modern source present here with the topic of the Holocaust. A conclusion to the volume would be welcome, as it would permit to discuss the various conclusions presented by the individual authors. Altogether, the volume is an important contribution to scholarship both into the field of egodocuments and of Jewish Studies, and it could be used not only by historians but also students interested in these topics.

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