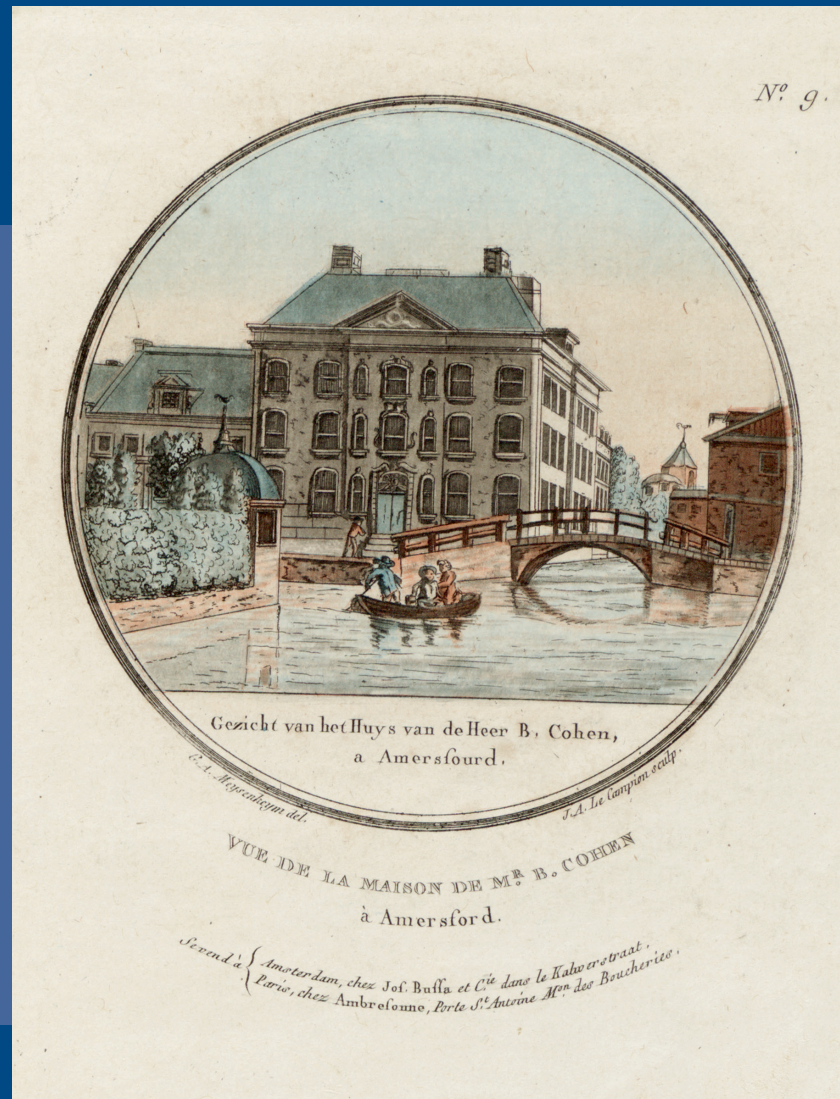


1787

'View of the House of
Mr B. Cohen at Amersfoort',
1750–1800. J.A. Le Campion,
G.A. Meysenheym, Jos. and
Cie Buffa, Ambresonne.

Collection of the Jewish
Museum Amsterdam
(Collection of J. van Velzen):
M007534.



Benjamin Cohen and Jewish Orangists

From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, Jews in the Dutch Republic were increasingly involved in national politics, especially in the conflict between the democratic Patriots and the supporters of Stadholder William V, known as Orangists. Partly inspired by Enlightenment ideals and the American Revolution, the Patriots resisted the weak policy of the stadholder and demanded a more democratic form of government. Jews emerged as fervent supporters of the House of Orange and its stadholder, and Jewish Orangism became more visible than ever in the 'civil war' of 1786–1787. In 1785 William V fled The Hague after the Patriots took power. The house of Benjamin Cohen (1726–1800) in Amersfoort served as the headquarters of the stadholder's army and William himself stayed there from time to time, awaiting the arrival of Prussian troops who had been called upon to lead a counteroffensive against the Patriot army.

Benjamin Cohen was a prominent Jewish merchant. He owned tobacco plantations in the Dutch Republic and traded in diamonds. He was also a banker who

supported Jewish intellectuals, and in the 1790s he lent some eight million guilders to the Prussian government. Cohen had moved to Amsterdam in 1786, where he was immediately elected to the position of *parnas*. His Orangism was beyond doubt and in that he was not alone. Many Jews remained loyal to the House of Orange and indeed fought for it. In Amsterdam's Jewish quarter in 1787, at the height of the conflict, a Jewish police force was deployed to quash fighting between Patriots and Jews and to restore order.

Jewish Orangism was one of the reasons why after 1796 the revolutionary government hesitated for a long time before putting into practice the rights given to the Jews by the emancipation decree of that year. Jews were Or-

angists, after all, and so in theory hostile. As a matter of principle, however, the Patriots gave all Jews civil rights and Jewish Orangism went underground. Only after William Frederick, Prince of Orange, landed on the beach at Scheveningen in 1813 did Jewish enthusiasm for the House of Orange come out into the open once more.

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