

Jaap W. Focke, *Machseh Lajesoumim. A Jewish Orphanage in the City of Leiden, 1890-1943* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021). 384 p. ISBN 9789463726955.

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In 1971, G. Kerkvliet, M. Uitvlugt, W.F. van Zegveld and L.P. Kasteleyn started a research project about the Jewish Orphanage in Leiden. They consulted the archives and conducted interviews with survivors. In 2006, Jaap W. Focke, a retired geologist who worked as a teacher after his retirement, became involved and continued the work of his predecessors. The most important source for the present book are the archives of Hijme and Emilie Stoffels-van Brussel, members of the Dutch Underground who moved into a house behind the orphanage after their wedding in 1942 and played a very active role in helping the residents of the orphanage.

Before the war, there were eight Jewish orphanages in the Netherlands. Only three of these orphanages have been the subject of a book, none of them academic. Lea Appel's book about the Amsterdam girls' orphanage in the Rapenburgerstraat (1982), Ies van Creveld's about the The Hague orphanage (2004) and Frans Crone's work about the Utrecht orphanage (2005) are less focused on the individual stories than the present book. Daniël Metz wrote a useful short overview article on all orphanages in 2005.

The Leiden orphanage was opened in 1890 in a building not fit for purpose, at the Stille Rijn. In 1929, the orphanage moved to a new building, especially built as an orphanage, on the Roodenburgerstraat. Little is known about the period at the Stille Rijn and, consequently, Focke is very brief about it. He probably did not mind that much, as Focke is especially passionate about telling the stories of those children who did not survive the Shoah. His first visit to Yad Vashem in 1974 had made a huge impression on him and the purpose of the book is first and foremost to give the murdered children a name and a face. With regard to this last goal the author has assembled an impressive collection of photographs, which are included in the book and thus enliven the text. For many group photos, Focke has been able to trace the names of all the children depicted. This is also because he and his predecessors interviewed many survivors. Unfortunately, a list of those interviewed is lacking, as is a list of the many archives that Focke consulted.

The author himself was concerned about the readability of the book because he wanted to give as many details as possible about all 168 children who lived in the orphanage between 1929 and 1943. Indeed, sometimes Focke also informs us about the relatives of the residents of the Leiden orphanage, especially the parent (often the children who lived in the orphanage still had one parent but he or she could not take care of them) and their siblings. Focke himself calls this his 'intransigence'. But his worries are unjustified; the book is very readable despite the large number of names, persons and facts Focke is dealing with.

Focke does not only elaborately discuss the residents of the orphanage, he also provides a description of the course of the war in the Netherlands. This makes the book also readable for those who are not so well informed about the course of the war and the persecution of Jews in the Netherlands. It is perhaps also for this reason that Dan Michman, who wrote the preface, expresses the hope that the book will be used for educational purposes.

*Machseh Lajesoumim* gives the reader intimate insight into the children and staff of the Leiden orphanage, exactly as Focke intended. His descriptions are detailed and accurate. Moreover, the book fills in a gap in the historiography of the Shoah and at the same time sets an example of how it is possible to write, on an academic basis, a loving work about a pre-war institution whose residents, for the most part, did not survive the Shoah.

The only thing missing is facts about the Jewish basis of the orphanage. For example, a chance remark makes it clear that the orphanage was run as a kosher household while not being too orthodox in other respects. It is also to be hoped that in a next edition (this first edition was printed in a very limited volume) some small linguistic and factual errors will be corrected. And if the book is to be used in Dutch schools, a Dutch translation would certainly make things easier.

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