

DAVID SENIOR

[September 13, 1749]

ויקרבו ימי דוד למות<sup>1</sup>

מצבת

קבורת דוד שניאור אשר בא לעולם ביום ד' י"ב  
 לחדש אייר שנת ס"מ"ר מ"פ"ח"ד בשרי וממשפטיך  
 יראתי<sup>2</sup> לפ"ק ובחייו תקן מצבת זו לשאול בו לכל קוראו  
 יתפלל אל א' ירחם על נפשו: נפטר לבית עולמו  
 יום ראש השנה ראשון לחדש תשרי בשנת אך  
 אלהים יפרה נפשי מיד שאול כי יקחני סלה<sup>3</sup> לפ"ק

ת"כ"ה<sup>4</sup>

SEPULTURA

ת"נ"צ"

DE DAVID SENIOR QUE ENTROU NESTE  
 MUNDO EM 4<sup>TA</sup> FEIRA 12 DO MEZ DE IAR A<sup>O</sup> 5424 E  
 RESEANDO DE SEUS PRINCIPIOS A CONTA QUE HAVIA  
 DE DAR NO FIM, COMPOZ EM SUA VIDA ESTE  
 EPITAPHIO PARA AAMELLE (sic) PEDIR A TODOS QUE  
 O LEREM ROQUEM A D<sup>S</sup> SE APIADE DE SUA  
 ALMA FALLECEU EM ROS ASANA PRIMEIRO  
 DO MEZ DE TISRI A<sup>O</sup> 5510 E DIGAO D<sup>S</sup> REDIMA SUA  
 ALMA DA FOSA, E A NOSSA QUANDO NOS RECOLHER PA<sup>A</sup> SI  
 S A G

צדיק כתמר יפרח<sup>5</sup>

D E G

רכב עלי כנפי זכיותיו  
 דוד לבית שניאור מעון שמים  
 עשיר ודל חנן מצרותיו  
 גם מועצותיו פקחו עינים  
 נפשו כשנאנים נקיי פשע  
 \*תחזה בנועם א' בהכלי ישע

<sup>1</sup> I Kings 2:1.<sup>2</sup> Psalms 119:120.<sup>3</sup> Psalms 49:16.<sup>4</sup> תחת כסא הכבוד.<sup>5</sup> Psalms 92:13.

\* C 867, V/E, between his wife Sara Hana (C 866) and his grandson David, son of Abraham Senior (C 868).

THE SENIOR FAMILY was among the first Spanish-Portuguese Jewish families to settle in Amsterdam where they are found in 1598. Duarte Seraiva, alias David Senior de Marante, registered his marriage to Maria Nunes de Saõ de Porto, daughter of Pedro Homen and Branca Nunes, on August 20, 1598 (DTB 665, f. 22v). Eighteen years later a certain Philippe Henricus (Henriquez),<sup>1</sup> alias Juda Senior, 28, registered his marriage on December 13, 1616, to Ester, 16, the daughter of Sebastian Pimentel and Sara Linda (DTB 668, f. 65). This was a union between two families of the high Spanish-Portuguese Jewish aristocracy. (See our *Guedolé*, no. 187, pp. 119-120, about the Senior family of Salonica.) Juda-Philippe and Ester were the grandparents of the Seniors of Curaçao. As far as we know, they had three children: Mordechay, Jahacob, and Ribca who married Jacob Fundam in 1656.

Mordechay, as his will discloses, was born in Amsterdam where he was circumcized eight days afterwards on the 13th of *Menahem*, 5380 (July [August] 13, 1620). His brother Jacob was born circa 1631. As a bachelor Mordechay had accompanied several members of his family to Brazil where he executed a will later revoked in Amsterdam. When he and his coreligionaries were forced to leave Brazil for Holland in 1654, he left behind a fortune of 54,278 :-:2 florins. The States-General of Holland was still claiming it from the Portuguese Crown in 1672.

On February 26, 1658, four years after his return to Amsterdam, Mordechay, under the alias of Henriquez, and his brother Jacob Senior Henriquez registered their marriage in Amsterdam to the sisters Sara and Hester, daughters of Rachel Lopes (DTB 684, f. 11v). Their wives were the sisters of Antonio Lopes Suasso, Baron of Avernoes le Gras (DTB 691, f. 51).

Mordechay and Sara had eleven children: Jeudah, Jahacob; Ester married in 1680 to her cousin Judah de Jacob Senior; our David; Ischack (Biog. 36), Abraham; Rachel married to her cousin Abraham de Jacob Fundam in 1686; Benjamin, Mosseh, Ribca and Salamao.

In 1670 Mordechay Senior and his sons donated 200 florins toward the construction of the present synagogue in Amsterdam (PJCAA, *Acordos*, p. 626). Ten years later poor health prompted him to draw up his will. It gives us a splendid insight into Jewish life of that period and details that are particularly interesting to his descendants. These are some of its salient provisions. He started out by declaring that he had purchased two graves from the Parnassim: one for himself and the other for his wife. He ordered his

<sup>1</sup> In 1623 Philippe Henriquez had a brother in Amsterdam called David Senior. He may have been the same David Senior who registered his marriage in 1638 to Hester Rodrigues Portalegre, niece of Jacob Senior's daughter Hanna (the second wife of Michael Spinoza and mother of Philosopher Benedictus).

share of stock in the Company of the Indias (sic) and 2,500 florins provided that Jehuda married Ester Fundam, the daughter of testator's sister, Ribca Fundam. If Ester died unmarried, then Jehuda would not receive the 2,500 florins. If Jehuda died single and Mordechay's second son Jacob married Ester, then that sum would go to Jacob. (It is noteworthy that Jehuda as primogeniture inherited his father's profession of licensed broker.)

To his son Jacob (who later assumed the alias of his grandfather, Philippe Henriques), he left a gold chain and a set of gold buttons of testator's father.

To his wife Sara, he left all the jewelry. At the same time he acknowledged receipt of the 9,000 florins she had brought him as dowry. To it he added the customary 50% supplement, thus bringing its total value to 13,500 florins.

Mordechay was a member of the Santa Companhia de Dotar of Amsterdam and also of Venice. To his eldest sons Jehuda and Jacob he left the right of choice of membership. Jehuda chose the Venice society; Jacob, that of Amsterdam. On Jacob's death this membership devolved upon and was assumed by our David (PJCAA, Dotar).

To the Ets Haim Seminary he left 300 florins for the recital of perpetual memorial prayers for him and his wife on the holy day of *Shabuot*. A few days after Mordechay's death in December 1680, his children also donated 200 florins to the synagogue of Amsterdam for perpetual memorial services for him and their mother who died in 1689. (PJCAA, Escamot, B, 1st of Tebet, 5441 [1680]).

Any child who married without his mother's consent was automatically excluded from his bequest. The residuary estate was to be divided equally among all the children on their attaining the age of twenty-five years or on their marriage.

As his executors, Mordechay named his wife, his brother Jacob and his brother-in-law David Lopes Henriquez, the husband of his wife's sister Rachel. If they ran into difficulty, they were counselled to seek the advice of his good friend Abraham de Ischak Penso.

The most interesting feature of Mordechay's will is the injunction to his children to revere God; to conduct their business honestly; to be discreet, loyal and true to their employers; to obey their mother and to try and marry relatives or, if that was not possible, at least their equals.

Mordechay wrote this will in Portuguese and captioned it with the Hebrew letters: בה (= בעזרת האל – “Be‘ezrath ha El” [With God’s help]). He signed it with his wife on the 3rd of *Adar Seni*, 5440, corresponding to the 4th of March of the *solar* year 1680, and had it sealed by Notary H. Outgers, whom he designated as “my friend” (GAA 3246, no. 224).

Mordechay’s sons abided by his counsel. Jehuda, the eldest, married his cousin Ester Fundam. When she died, presumably in childbirth, he married her sister Sara Fundam. Benjamin married his cousin Rachel de Jacob Senior. All the others who married, including our David, took their equals, i. e., girls from the best Portuguese Jewish families of the day.

#### THE SENIORS IN CURAÇAO

Poet Barrios, to whom we are indebted for much information on various Jewish families of Amsterdam of his time, tells us that Jacob Senior Henriquez, an uncle of our David, was a very charitable person and that he had served as treasurer of the *Yesiba Meyrat Henayim*. Lack of space prevents us from reproducing Barrios’ magnificent poem dedicated to David’s uncle. David also earned Barrios’ praise. The poet called him “expert” for his excellence in the study of the Torah. David continued with his studies at the *Yesiba Shahare Sedek* up to 1683-84 when Barrios composed his poem (p. 350).

David’s brother Jacob was still in Amsterdam in 1684 when he was taxed ten florins’ *finta* (community tax). Barrios’ eulogy and this community tax item make it clear that David and his brother Jacob were in Amsterdam up to 1684. They must have reached Curaçao in 1685 with their younger brothers Ishac (Biog. 36) and Salomon (C 1037), especially since Jacob (alias Philippe Henriquez) officiated there as Bridegroom of the Law in 1686. It is very probable that the brothers Senior were induced to come to Curaçao by their relative Mosseh Lopes Henriques who had gone there in 1680 (Biog. 51).

Although the West India Company enjoyed a monopoly of the lucrative slave trade, it nevertheless permitted a rare few to engage in the business (*assientos*) in conjunction with it. David and his brother Jacob-Philippe represented one of these traders.

The brothers Senior brought with them the good name they had inherited from their parents and possibly a part of their inheritance. David did not find the slave trade particularly to his taste. After all, it was incompatible with the teachings of the Bible and with the inherent Jewish spirit of freedom. Fortunately, the Seniors had capable brothers and brothers-in-law in Amsterdam who could ship them *cargazones* – merchandise of all kinds. David’s will

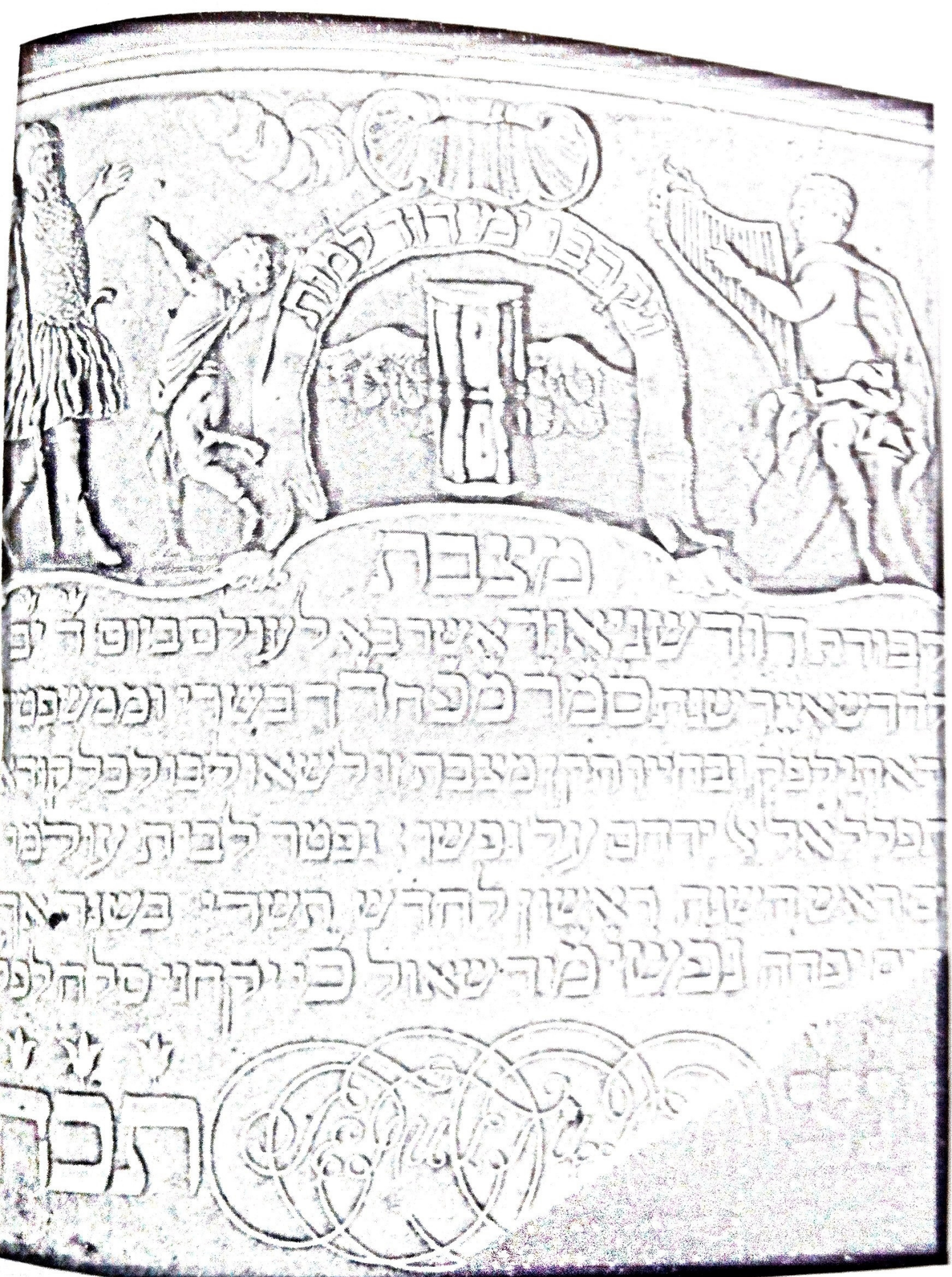


Photo by J. v. Essen, Capri, 1911



Photo by J. v. Essen, Curacao

45 TOMBSTONE OF ISHAC H. SENIOR, 1726, page 283

discloses that in 1692 he and his brother Ishac went into the *cargazones* business and engaged in it until Ishac's death in June 1693.

At the same time, and perhaps earlier, our David was in partnership with Jan Donker, ex-governor of Curaçao. Donker had a 6/12's share; Philippe Henriquez (brother of our David), 3/12's, and our David with his two brothers-in-law Juda Senior and Abraham Fundam, 1/12 each. This association became dissolved in June 1696 with Donker's return to Holland. It was reorganized so that Philippe Henriquez remained with a 6/9's interest and our David and his two brothers-in-law cited above with 1/9 each. The huge losses they sustained between 1703-04 forced the dissolution of this firm too. David related in his will that he sold all his belongings to pay off his representatives in Holland in order to uphold his honor which he valued above all things.

A business association with his son Isaac (Biog. 89) between 1708 and 1719 also proved unsuccessful. David's will also made reference to the firm of David Senior & Sons. That enterprise apparently turned out just as unfavorably as the others.

Our David knew wealth. Between 1711 and 1716 he was classed among the highest payers of family tax. But in Curaçao, as everywhere, the wheel of fortune does not remain still. From 1719 to the end of his life David wavered between the middle and the lowest tax brackets (WICA 575, p. 460; WICA 588, p. 528 v).

Following his father's testamentary counsel, David also insisted upon paying strangers first and family afterwards "in order to maintain my honor which I have always esteemed." David realized that in order to satisfy his creditors, his sons would be forced to sell his two plantations and the house which he had built next to the Synagogue. For that reason he ordered his sons to purchase that house and the "Remillete de Flores" (Bloempot[?]) plantation of which he and his wife had been so fond. In 1745 business reverses compelled him to sell for 5,250 pesos his "Bloempot" plantation which he had owned since 1690 (OAC 816, no. 102; WICA 592, p. 921 b).

#### DAVID'S RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Because of his command of the Dutch language, our David had access to the homes of the island's great with whom he transacted business, among them, ex-Governor Donker earlier cited.

Poet-historian David Franco Mendes, author of the last lines in Hebrew of our epitaph, justified the fourth line: "Also his counsel opened their eyes" by his explanation in Portuguese: "The foregoing epitaph was composed for David Senior of Curaçao whose advice the governor listened to with great interest" ("Kinor David," Msc., Ets Haim Library, p. 42).

Our History in manuscript gives details on David's participation in community life, his diplomatic mission to Coro and his dispute with Councilman Frederick Eck.

Let us continue with facts of a personal nature as revealed in his will. In spite of his precarious economic situation David ordered that three of his slaves were to be freed on his death. He also ordered that twenty-five pesos were to be distributed to the poor on the day of his burial, on the seventh day on the thirtieth day and on the termination of the eleven months of mourning respectively. He left 100 pesos for the recital of perpetual memorial prayers for himself and his wife. Like his father, he left 150 florins to the Ets Haim Seminary of Amsterdam of which he was a member and whose professors he had always admired.

He wrote and signed his will in Portuguese on June 29, 1733. Like many Sephardis, he appended to his signature the letters: סט for טוב (My end be good) and not as some maintain: ספרדי טהור (Blue-blooded Sephardi).<sup>1</sup> Jacob de Efraim Jesurun Henriques and Jeoshuah Henriques Junior acted as witnesses to his will (OAC 821, Nov. 4, 1749).

Our David married Sara, daughter of Ishac de Marchena (Biog. 54), Curaçao. On her death in 1730, he dedicated the following lines to her:

וְתַמַּת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַעַת אַרְבַּע הִיא חֲבוּרָן  
שׁוֹרֵה בְּצַדִּיקָתָהּ וְעֵנּוֹת רוּחַ  
מִצָּאָה מִנּוּחָהּ תּוֹךְ שְׁמֵי הַמּוֹחַר  
הִיְתָה כִּמּוֹ חַיָּה נֶהֱבַעַת לְשׁוּחַ  
תּוֹרַח בְּאוּר אֲדָרָן בְּזִיו וְזוּהַר

By modifying the word בקריה to בקריעת of Genesis 23:2, the author of the epitaph sought to express the grief felt by Sara's four motherless children: Mordechay, Jacob, Abraham and Rachel.

As indicated in the first Hebrew text of his epitaph, David prepared his gravestone during his lifetime. In this respect he followed the example of his brother Mosseh who died in Amsterdam in 1730. (Mosseh's tombstone was considered by Henriques de Castro as one of the most valuable art treasures of the Ouderkerk Cemetery [pp. 115-116, Illustration XII, and Msc., *ibid.* vol. II, p. 298, no. 14]).

David's epitaph has an original quality that makes it stand out among others. We are therefore translating the first part of it from the Hebrew.

<sup>1</sup> See M. D. Gaon's interpretation of this term in the August 1956 issue of the *Jerusalem bi-monthly Mahbereth*, vol. V, p. 158.



Tombstone / of David Senior born on Wednesday the 12th of / Jiar of the year  
 [5424 = May 7, 1664] "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee, and I am afraid  
 of Thy judgment" /<sup>1</sup> During his life he penned this epitaph to beg each reader /  
 To pray God for pity on his soul. Departed for his everlasting home / on the day  
 of the New Year, the first of Tishri [5510 = September 13, 1749] "God / will  
 redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me." /<sup>1</sup> May  
 his soul be bound up [in the bond of life] under the celestial throne.

The liberal translation of Psalm 49:16 as given in the Portuguese text is a happy one indeed: "And let them say 'May God redeem *his* soul from the power of the grave and *ours* when He gathers *us* unto Him'" (our italics).

It was through the initiative of Otto de Isaac Senior, a descendant of our illustrious figure of eighteenth century Curaçao, that Congregation Mikvé Israel undertook to publish this modest work at their expense. His proposal won the unanimous support of the Mahamad of 1953 and of practically the entire Community.

More details on this family are given in our History in manuscript.

<sup>1</sup> The numerical values of the marked letters in these verses represent the years 5424 and 5500, respectively. The latter should have been 5510 — the sculptor neglected to punctuate the letter yod having a value of ten.